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Fall 1997 • #2

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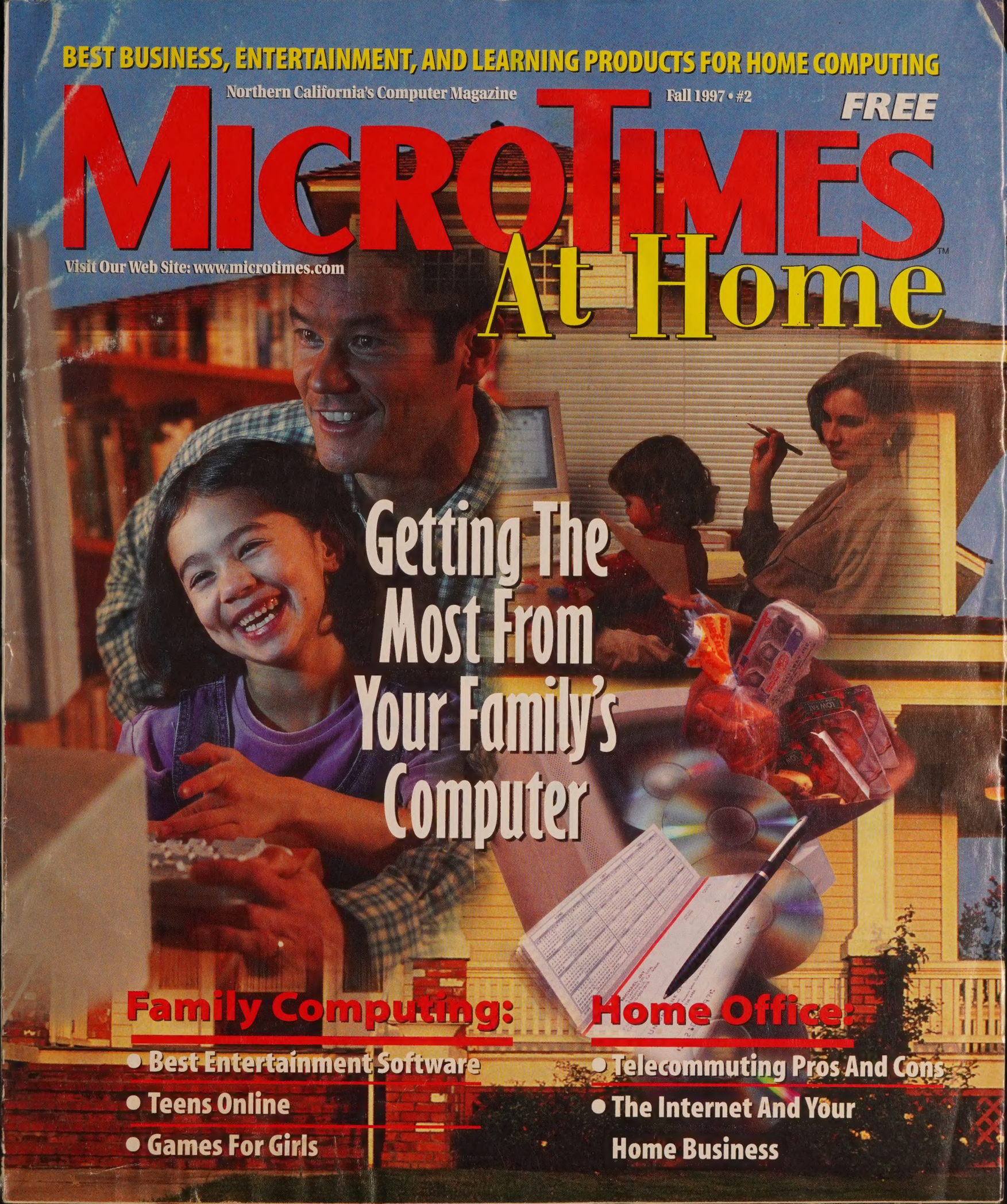

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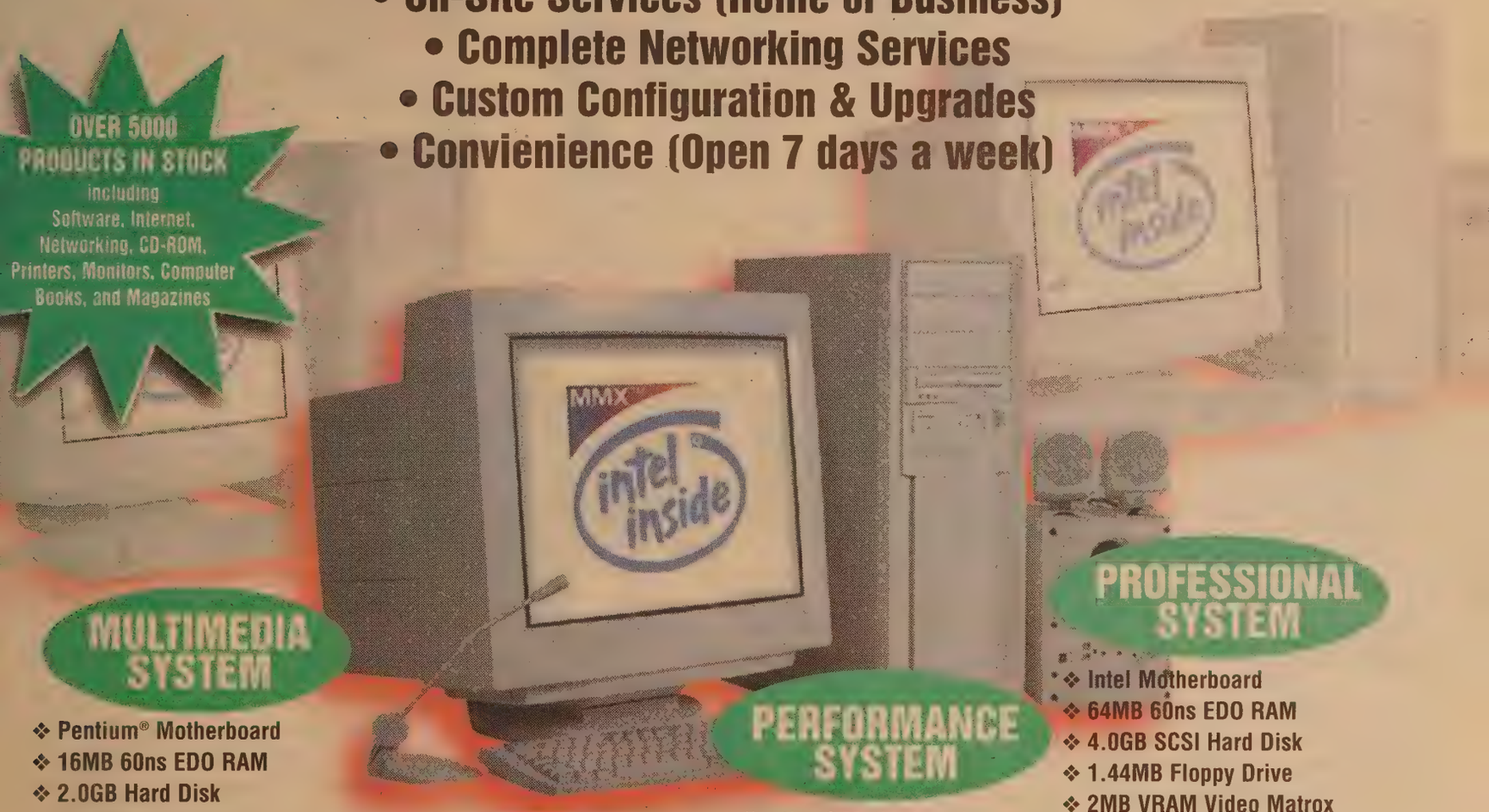

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MicroTimes At Home

A Note From The Editor:

We're Back!

And it's nice to be here again. It's been quite an eventful year and we're happy to present the second edition of *MicroTimes At Home*.

As we said when we launched the annual publication last year, *MicroTimes At Home* is especially tailored to the needs of home-based computer users, whether they're working in a home office, helping the kids with schoolwork, or surfing the Web.

Once again, we've asked our writers for their recommendations for the most useful products, services, and general advice, and they've come through like champs. We also feature articles on subjects ranging from setting up your home office for optimal productivity to the latest in cool games.

MicroTimes At Home #1, published last year, contained articles on subjects like your first computer purchase, setting up the machine once you've got it home, how to get help when you need it, etc. If you missed that issue, its articles are available online on our Web site—set your browser to *www.microtimes.com/athome/contents.html*, and select the stories that interest you.

If you don't have Web access (yet!), *MicroTimes At Home* #1 is also available as a back issue for $6; call, write, or email (see contact info) for details.

We hope you find this latest issue of *MicroTimes At Home* helpful, and invite your feedback to *editors@microtimes.com*.

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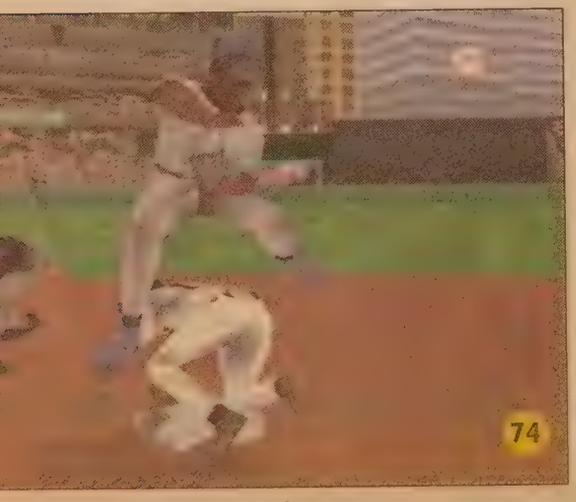

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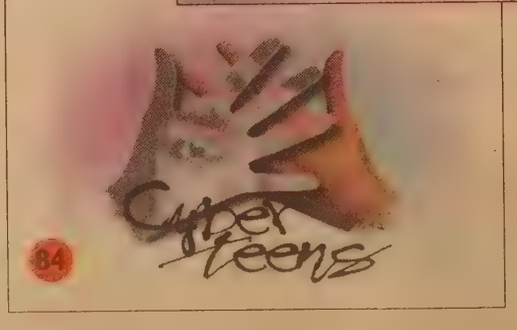

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PP-180 (Intel Venus) ATX.....1478
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MMX-P200/512K (Intel Tucson) ATX.....1458
MMX-P166/512K (Intel Tucson) ATX.....1348
MMX-P233/256K (Super Micro).....1498
MMX-P200/256K (Super Micro).....1368
MMX-P166/256K (Super Micro).....1258
P5-200/256K (Super Micro).....1328
P5-166/256K (Super Micro).....1268
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- Windows NT 4.0 10 Client Server.....598

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Pentium II-233 (Intel Portland) ATX.....1586
Pentium II-266 (Asus or Super Micro).....1738
MMX-P233/512K (Intel Tucson) ATX.....1318
MMX-P200/512K (Intel Tucson) ATX.....1188
MMX-P166/512K (Intel Tucson) ATX.....1078
P5-200/256K (Intel Marl) ATX.....1088
P5-166/256K (Intel Marl) ATX.....1028
MMX-P233/512K (Super Micro).....1228
MMX-P200/512K (Super Micro).....1108
MMX-P166/256K (Super Micro).....998
AMD K6-233/256K (Super Micro).....1148
AMD K6-200/256K (Super Micro).....1058
AMD K6-166/256K (Super Micro).....978
P5-200/256K (Super Micro).....1058
P5-166/256K (Super Micro).....978
P5-150/512K (Asus VX97).....948

Upgrades
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- Windows NT 4.0 5 Client Server.....448

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- Sound Blaster 16 PNP & 80W Speakers
- TEAC 1.44MB 3.5" Floppy Drive
- Mid Tower Case with Power Supply
- Keytronics Keyboard for Windows 95
- Free Mouse with Pad
- Free Microsoft Windows 95
- Free CD Deluxe Pack
- Monitor Sold Separately (see page 3)

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MMX-P166/256K (Super Micro).....868
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MMX-P200/512K (Intel Triton TX).....938
MMX-P166/512K (Intel Triton TX).....838
AMD K6-233/512K (Intel Triton TX).....988
AMD K6-200/512K (Intel Triton TX).....888
AMD K6-166/512K (Intel Triton TX).....818
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6X86-P200+/512K (Intel Triton TX).....768
6X86-P166+/256K (Intel Triton VX).....728
AMD K5-P166/256K (Intel Triton VX).....768
AMD K5-P75/256K (Intel Triton VX).....708

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- Windows NT 4.0 WorkStation.....144

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PENTIUM II-233 (INTEL PORTLAND M/B) ATX	244	796	N/A	N/A	1076	1186	N/A	N/A	1326	1496
PENTIUM II-266 (SUPER MICRO M/B) ATX	244	956	N/A	N/A	1236	1346	N/A	N/A	1486	1656
PENTIUM II-266 (ASUS M/B) ATX	244	956	N/A	N/A	1236	1346	N/A	N/A	1486	1656
DUAL PP-200C (Intel Providence M/B) ATX w/ 1 CPU	484	956	N/A	N/A	1236	1366	N/A	N/A	1486	1676
DUAL PP-200C (SUPER MICRO M/B) w/ 1 CPU	288	756	$906	$936	986	1086	$1136	$1176	1236	1396
PP-200C (SUPER MICRO M/B)	238	716	866	896	946	1046	1096	1136	1196	1356
PP-180C (SUPER MICRO M/B)	238	536	686	716	766	866	916	956	1016	1176
PP-200C (INTEL VENUS M/B) ATX	124	606	776	806	856	956	1006	1046	1106	1266
P5-200C (INTEL MARL M/B) ATX (Tucson: +$70)	98	306	476	506	556	656	706	746	806	966
P5-166C (INTEL MARL M/B) ATX (Tucson: +$70)	98	246	416	446	496	596	646	686	746	906
P5-150C (INTEL MARL M/B) ATX (Tucson: +$70)	98	206	376	406	456	556	606	646	706	866
MMX-P233/256K (SUPER MICRO M/B)	128	496	626	656	706	806	856	896	956	1116
MMX-P200/256K (SUPER MICRO M/B)	128	376	506	536	586	686	736	776	836	996
MMX-P166/256K (SUPER MICRO M/B)	128	266	396	426	476	576	626	666	726	886
AMD K6-233/256K (SUPER MICRO M/B)	128	426	556	586	636	736	786	826	886	1046
AMD K6-200/256K (SUPER MICRO M/B)	128	326	456	486	536	636	686	726	786	946
AMD K6-166/256K (SUPER MICRO M/B)	128	266	396	426	476	576	626	666	726	886
P5-200/512K (ASUS VX97 M/B)	89	296	426	456	506	606	656	696	756	916
P5-166/512K (ASUS VX97 M/B)	89	236	366	396	446	546	596	636	696	856
P5-150/512K (ASUS VX97 M/B)	89	196	326	356	406	506	556	596	656	816
MMX-P233/512K (INTEL TRITON TX)	94	466	596	626	676	776	826	866	926	1086
MMX-P200/512K (INTEL TRITON TX)	94	346	476	506	556	656	706	746	806	966
MMX-P166/512K (INTEL TRITON TX)	94	236	366	396	446	546	596	636	696	856
AMD K6-P233/512K (INTEL TRITON TX)	94	386	516	546	596	696	746	786	846	1006
AMD K6-P200/512K (INTEL TRITON TX)	94	286	416	446	496	596	646	686	746	906
AMD K6-P166/512K (INTEL TRITON TX)	94	226	356	386	436	536	586	626	686	846
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P5-166C (INTEL TRITON VX)	62	206	336	366	416	516	566	606	666	826
P5-150C (INTEL TRITON VX)	62	166	296	326	376	476	526	566	626	786
6X86-P200+/512K (INTEL TRITON TX)	94	166	296	326	376	476	526	566	626	786
6X86-P166+ (INTEL TRITON VX)	62	126	256	286	336	436	486	526	586	746
AMD K5-166C (INTEL TRITON VX)	62	156	286	316	366	466	516	556	616	776
AMD K5-133C (INTEL TRITON VX)	62	136	266	296	346	446	496	536	596	756
AMD K5-75C (INTEL TRITON VX)	62	96	226	256	306	406	456	496	556	716
486DX4-100C VLB-PCI	54	96	226	256	306	406	456	496	556	716

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MMX-P200/512K (Intel Triton TX) 788
MMX-P166/512K (Intel Triton TX) 678
AMD K6-233/512K (Intel Triton TX) 828
AMD K6-200/512K (Intel Triton TX) 738
P5-200/256K (Intel Triton VX) 728
P5-166/256K (Intel Triton VX) 648
P5-150/256K (Intel Triton VX) 618
6X86-P200+/512K (Intel Triton TX) 608
6X86-P166+/256K (Intel Triton VX) 578
AMD K5-P166/256K (Intel Triton VX) 608
AMD K5-P133/256K (Intel Triton VX) 598
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Pentium II-233 (Asus or Super Micro) 1418
MMX-P233/256K (Super Micro) 1058
MMX-P200/256K (Super Micro) 938
MMX-P166/256K (Super Micro) 828
P5-200/256K (Super Micro) 898
P5-166/256K (Super Micro) 838
P5-150/256K (Super Micro) 788
MMX-P233/512K (Intel Triton TX) 1028
MMX-P200/512K (Intel Triton TX) 908
MMX-P166/512K (Intel Triton TX) 798
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- TEAC 1.44MB 3.5" Floppy Drive
- Keytronics Keyboard for Windows 95
- Medium Tower Case or w/Power Supply
- Free Microsoft Windows 95 and Mouse
- Monitor Sold Separately (please see next page)

intel inside

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Pentium II-233 (Intel Portland) ATX 1458
Pentium II-266 (Asus or Super Micro) 1608
Pentium II-233 (Asus or Super Micro) 1448
Dual PP-200 (Super Micro) w/1CPU 1568
Dual PP-180 (Super Micro) w/1CPU 1388
PP-200 (Super Micro) 1498
PP-180 (Super Micro) 1338
PP-200 (Intel Venus) ATX 1438
PP-180 (Intel Venus) ATX 1278
MMX-P233/256K (Super Micro) 1288
MMX-P200/256K (Super Micro) 1158
MMX-P166/256K (Super Micro) 1058
P5-200/256K (Intel Marl) ATX 1148
P5-166/256K (Intel Marl) ATX 1068
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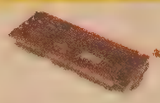

IDE 2FD/2HD with 2S/1P/1G $10
VLB EIDE I/O with 16550 15

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1520 / 1542 CP (SCSI) ..... $65 / 158
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SCSI 1.0GB / 1.2GB / 2.0GB ..... 178 / 194 / 208
SCSI 4.0GB / 9.0GB ..... 438 / 1148

FUJITSU IDE 1.2GB / 1.7GB ..... 149 / 158
FUJITSU IDE 2.0 GB / 2.5GB ..... 168 / 192
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JTS IDE 2.0GB / 2.5GB / 3.0GB 158/180/194
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Maxiswitch Nova for Windows 95 15
Maxiswitch Nova PS/2 16
Microsoft Natural Key (w/System) 42
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MEMORY & CPU

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8MB (2x32) (72-Pin) 29
16MB (4x32) 72-Pin) 54
32MB (8x32) (72-Pin) 108
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8MB (2x32) (EDO) 29
16MB (4x32) (EDO) 54
32MB (8x32) (EDO) 108

CPU
AMD 5X86-133 / K5-75 ..... 68 / 34
AMD K5-P100 / 133 / 166 ..... 56 / 74 / 94
AMD K6-166 / 200 / 233 ..... 138 / 204 / 304
6X86 P-166+ / P-200+ ..... 64 / 78
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Intel P5-150 /166 / 200 ..... 104 / 148 / 199
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Intel Pentium Pro-200 478
Intel MMX-166 / 200 / 233 ..... 148 / 258 / 388
Intel Pentium II-233 / 266 ..... 549 / 699

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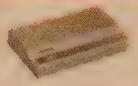

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Fax Modem 14,000 Internal w/Voice 28
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Fax Modem 33.6 with V.34 Int 44
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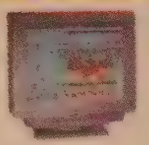
MONITORS *



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MAG INNOVISION
510V 15" 1280•1024 .28 ..... $262
DX15T 15" .25 Trinitron OSD Win 95 324
710V² 17" 1280•1024 .28 446
DJ702 17" .26 1280•1024 518
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TX-D75 20" .25 / FX-E7 21" .28 ..... 1604 / 1598

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E655 15" 1024•768 .28 268
15GS 15" 1280•1024 .28 316
15GA 15" 1280•1024 .27 w/Speakers 348
17EA 17" 1280•1024 .28 w/Speakers 514
G771 17" 1280•1024 .28 507
17GA 17" 1280•1024 .27 w/Speakers 556
17PS 17" 1600•1280 .25 Green 627
GT770 17" 1280•1024 .25 614
PT770 17" 1600•1280 .25 647
PT775 17" 1600•1280 .25 727
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* Monitor Viewable size may be smaller than advertised size

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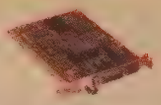

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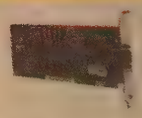

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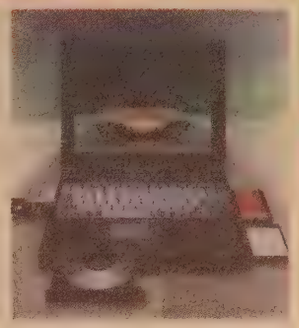

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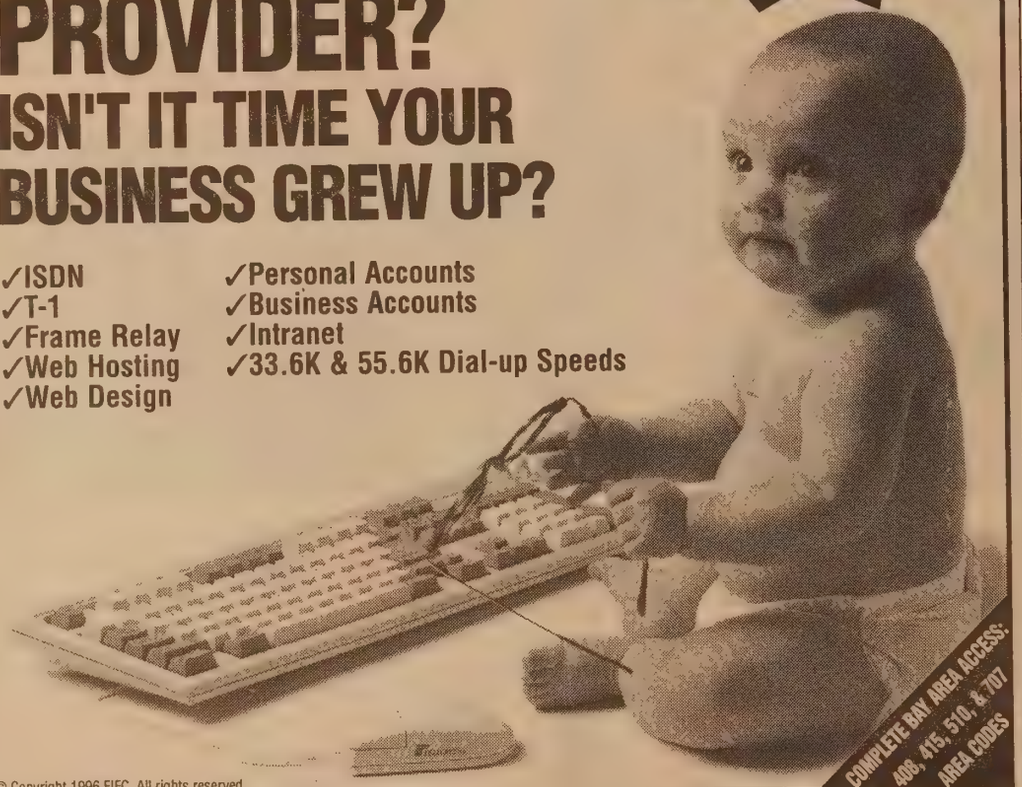

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California's Computer Magazine
MICROTIMES At Home

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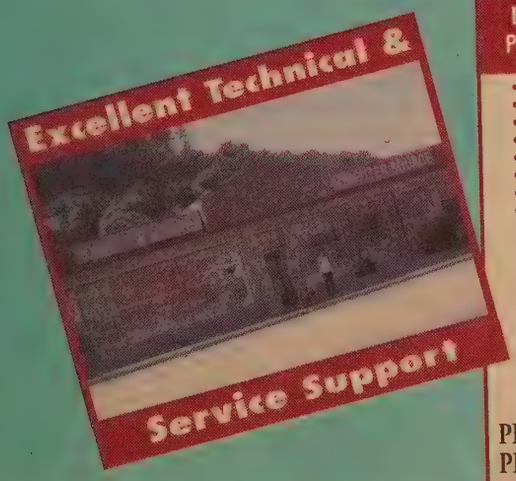

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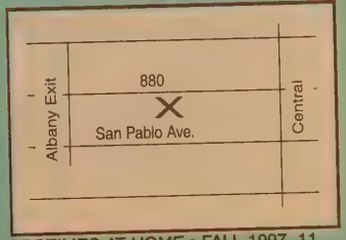

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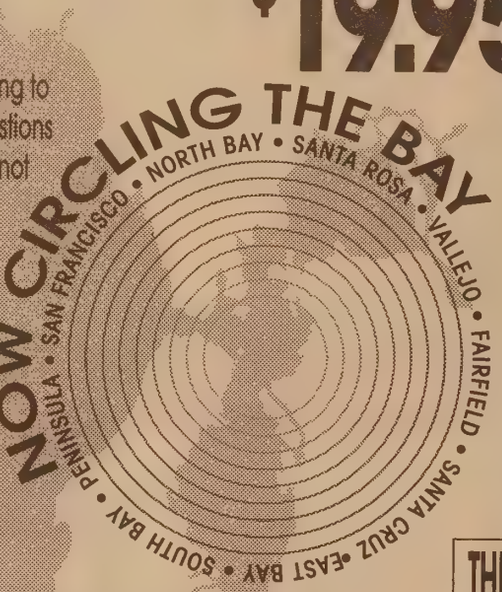

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PUBLISHER Chloe Vezo

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PRODUCTION 510-934-3700
Services provided by Electronic Graphics Group-West, a division of HPC
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DISTRIBUTION 510-489-7616
Distribution provided by DistribuTech, a division of HPC
GENERAL MANAGER Ken Morrison
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This Vol. 2 No. 1 Fall, 1997, Whole No. 2. *MicroTimes At Home* is published by HPC, Inc., a K-III Communications Corporation. Bay Area Office: 3470 Buskirk Ave., Pleasant Hill, CA 94523. Phone Advertising Office (510)934-3700. Fax (510)934-0883. email *Microx@well.com* Los Angeles Office, 6767 Forest Lawn Drive, Suite 110, Los Angeles, CA 90068. Phone (213)851-8600. Fax (213)851-8303. San Jose Office, 4010 Moorpark Ave., Ste. 105J, San Jose, CA 95117. Phone (408)244-4400. Fax (408)249-2343. Anaheim Office, 801 East Katella Ave., Suite #210, Anaheim, CA 92805. Phone (714)939-2809. Fax (714)978-6135. *MicroTimes*™ is © 1997 by HPC, Inc., a K-III Communications Corporation. Subscription rates: 14 issues, U.S.: 4th Class $35 (Allow 3 to 4 weeks for delivery), 1st Class $65 (Allow 1 to 2 weeks for delivery). MEXICO & CANADA: Surface Mail $60 (Allow 4 weeks for delivery). Air Mail $75 (Allow 1 week for delivery). OVERSEAS: Surface Mail $150 (Allow 6-10 weeks for delivery), Air Mail $178 (Allow 1 week for delivery). To receive sample issues, please send $6 ($15 for overseas) to cover postage costs. Back issues are $6 each.

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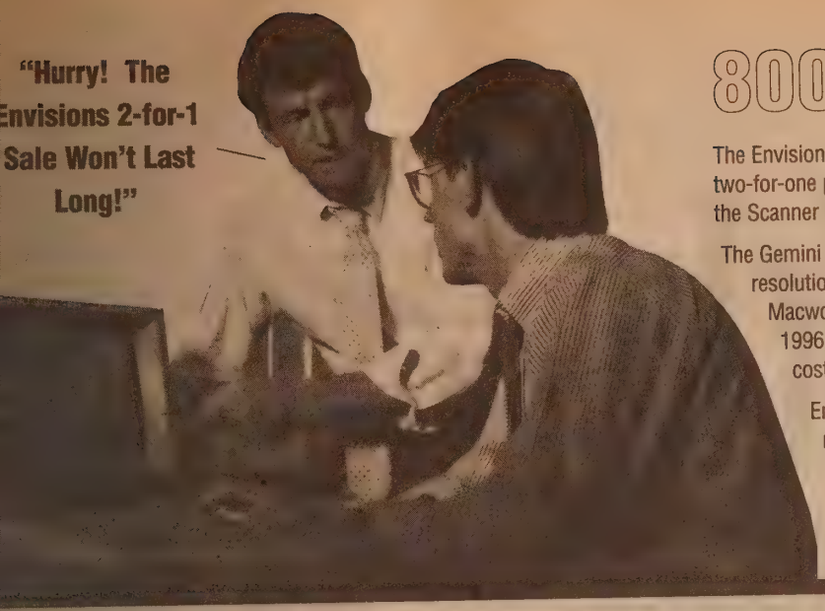

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The Envisions Scanner Outlet is clearing out the last of its Umax Gemini D16 scanners at an unbelievable two-for-one price of just $499. That's 50% off the last advertised price, so find a friend and head down to the Scanner Outlet today. This special offer is good only while supplies last.

The Gemini D16 has long been a favorite of graphics pros because it offers 800dpi maximum optical resolution, 30-bit color, and a transparency adapter (for slides and film). When Macworld rated it as one of the best graphics scanners on the market in March 1996, it cost $1,995. Now you can get the same great scanner for a quarter of the cost! Our sale price includes Adobe Photoshop LE & Presto! PageManager.

Envisions bought the last batch of Geminis the Umax factory ever made, so when these units are gone, they're gone forever. Hurry in today!

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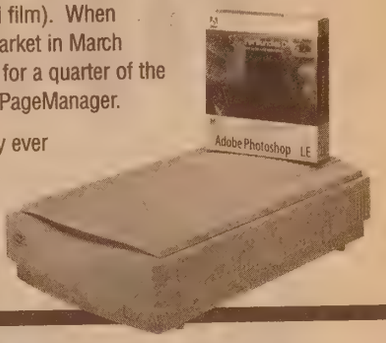

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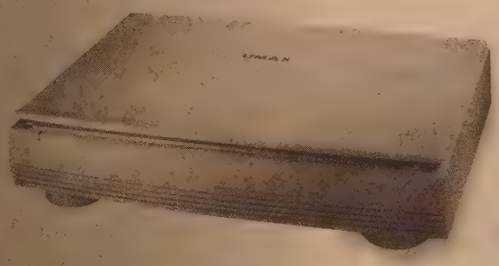

Umax Astra 300P
Now Just $178!

Connects to your PC's parallel port

For those who put ease of installation at the top of the list, Umax has the perfect solution. The new Astra 300P is a great color flatbed that plugs into your PC's parallel port, so you don't need to install an interface card or learn anything about SCSI in order to set it up.

In fact, the Astra 300P can be installed in under three minutes. It's so simple, it even takes up less desk space — it's just 16" x 12" x 3". The Astra 300P also weighs in at just 8 lbs., so it's light enough for anyone to take on the road.

The Astra 300P comes as a complete scanning system, including Adobe PhotoDeluxe for scanning, editing, and printing photos; Wordlinx OCR for converting text; and drivers for Windows 3.1 & Windows 95.

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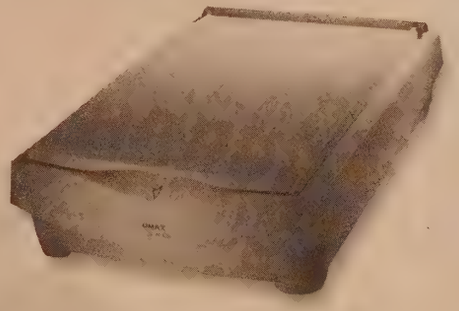

Umax Astra 600S
Now Just $198!

Fast SCSI scanning & legal-size bed

The Umax Astra 600S is the only scanner in its price range with 30-bit color and a full legal-sized scanning bed. The Astra 600S uses the same high-quality optics that have made Umax the 1997 Editors' Choice at both *PC Magazine* and *Macworld*.

With the 600S, you'll be able to add graphics to everything you produce on your PC. You can scan color photographs at 300dpi and add them to ads, brochures, and catalogs, or use them to spice up your web site.

The Astra 600S comes as a complete scanning system, with Adobe PhotoDeluxe for scanning, editing, and printing photos; Presto! PageManager for converting text; Windows 3.1, Windows 95, Windows NT & Mac drivers; and a SCSI-2 adapter card and cable.

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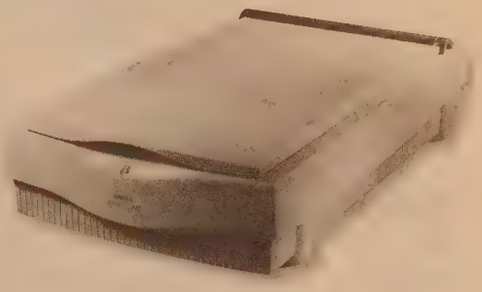

Umax Astra 1200S
Now Just $398!

Great resolution and color quality

PC Magazine says "Business and personal users need an easy-to-use device that will handle both document scanning and color scanning at an affordable price. For those users we recommend our Editors' Choice, the UMAX Vista-S12 ($500 street). The combination of value and performance delivered by the 24-bit, 600-dpi Vista was unparalleled in this roundup."

Now the S12 has been upgraded to the Astra 1200S, with the same great color quality *plus* a legal-size bed and a true 30-bit scanning process. These features make it an even better value at the same price!

The Astra 1200S comes with the same great software bundles as the other Astra scanners, and includes Windows 3.1, Windows 95, Windows NT & Mac drivers; and a SCSI-2 adapter card and cable.

Umax Astra 1200S Complete Scanning System (Reg. $499) $398
Umax Astra 1200S System with Adobe Photoshop 4.0 ..... $598

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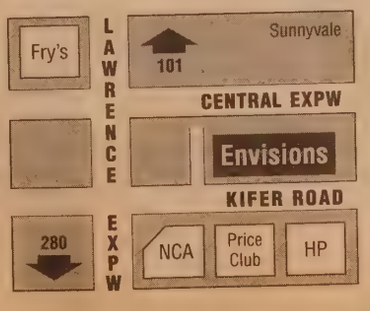

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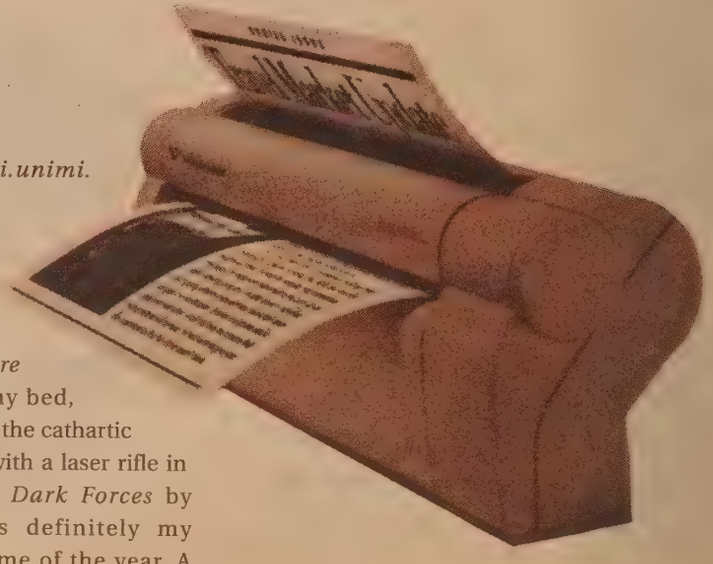
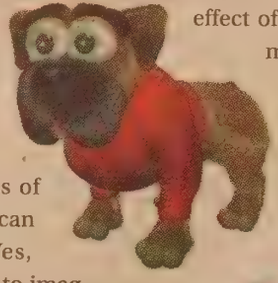
Tips & Picks For Computing At Home

We asked our writers and friends for their recommendations of products and resources they find especially useful or outstanding, as well as general advice. Here's what they had to say!



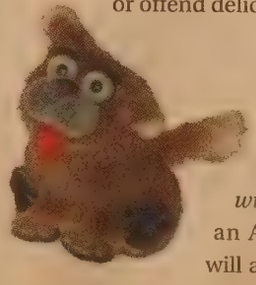
Best Games & Entertainment

Kevin Savetz: You can accuse me of living in the past, but these days my game time is spent in the '80s. I'm in love with a program called Multi Arcade Machine Emulator (MAME)—not technically a game, but an emulator that mimics perfectly the computers that early arcade video games worked on. So if you feel the need to play *Mouse Trap, Pac-Man, Q*bert, Donkey Kong, Moon Cresta, Zaxxon,* or any of eighty other classic arcade games, you can do it. Not funky clones, but the original games that ate quarters like popcorn.



MAME is free software, and copies of the ROMs needed to play the games can be stolen for free from the Net. (Yes, they're copyrighted. Although it's hard to imagine that anyone gets hurt when you play a game from a company that's out of business, maybe you won't want to download these games if you're planning on running for President.) You can download MAME from the Internet:
Windows version: *http://lim.dsi.unimi.it/curr/mix/mame/*
Mac version: *http://www.primenet.com/~brad man/mame/*
Info: *http://www.media.dsi.unimi.it/mame/*

Cassidy Allen: Maybe it's because I grew up with *Star Wars* action figures in my hands and *The Empire Strikes Back* blankets on my bed, maybe it's because I love the cathartic effect of jogging along with a laser rifle in my hands, but *Dark Forces* by LucasArts is definitely my favorite game of the year. A less-graphic variation of the very popular (and very bloody) *Doom, Dark Forces* has you in the POV of Rebel mercenary Kyle Katarn, running through Imperial bases, dodging lasers, searching for secret weapons and plans, and, of course, blasting Stormtroopers and other Imperial baddies with a vengeance. For those who are fans of the *Star Wars* universe and who have always fantasized about being Han Solo, this is your big chance. And with its relatively gore-free graphics, it's less likely to nauseate queasy stomachs or offend delicate sensibilities than *Doom.*



Mary Eisenhart: Digital pets became something of a craze during 1997. But forget the Tamagotchi—go straight to *www.pfmagic.com* and download an Adoption Kit for Dogz. The kit will allow you to play with five different digital puppies and contemplate their

Clockwise from top: Find out more about Cuba's medical network at CubaWeb's INFOMED; Qualcomm's Eudora Mail Pro is Michael Robin's email program of choice; and the Corporate Watch Web site "exposes corporate greed by documenting the social, political, economic, and environmental impacts of transnational corporations."

breed characteristics, after which, for a mere $19.95, you can adopt one of them as a permanent resident in your computer.

Which is an incredible bargain, because whoever did the programming of this software spent a lot of time paying attention to real dogs, to the point where it's easy to forget that you're not dealing with the genuine article. My Dogz, Virtual Rex, is an endearing, happy-go-lucky little fellow who entertains himself while I'm working, loves to get scratched (moaning in ecstasy and flailing his feet in the air), and peers hopefully around the word-processor window and drops a ball for me to throw. He also guards my computer with a password-protected screen saver mode, periodically emitting heartrending howls that were initially rather disconcerting to my colleagues.

Unlike the Tamagotchi, Dogz are not mortal, though they do mature from puppyhood into adult dogs. (There is some debate on P.F. Magic's Web site as to whether Dogz should be allowed to die—sentiment tends to be running against. This is not surprising—Virtual Rex's demise would be nearly as traumatic as the loss of Physical Rex, my *real* dog).

If, like many of my friends, you prefer feline companions, fear not—P.F. Magic also offers Catz, endowed with similar personality and verisimilitude. Finally, if you'd rather create your own new life form, you can opt for Oddballz. All of these are available for download at *www.pfmagic.com*, or in actual boxes at your local software store.

Best Educational Software

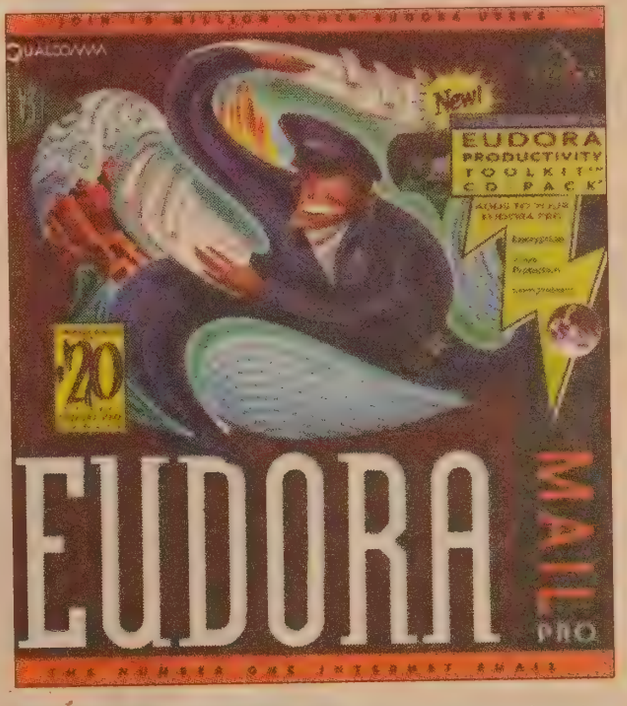
Cassidy Allen: Though informational CD-ROMs continue to fall a little flat in their promise of exciting "edutainment" made a few years back, there are still some very useful titles out there. I've found the CD-ROM version of *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* to be fantastic in its straightforwardness, versatility, and speed. As with the book edition, the CD-ROM is very to-the-point; you simply type in the word you're looking for into a field and a list of possible matches comes up. You select what's closest to what you're looking for and are then given the correct spelling, phonetic pronunciation, function, etymology, date, and definition of the word. The dictionary also works in reverse, allowing users to enter rough definitions or pronunciation and receiving words that possibly match the criteria. Audio pronunciation is also provided (even for the bad words!). To top it off, the user can switch to a Thesaurus format with the push of a button. Obviously it's not as immediately accessible as the print version, but when a dictionary is used often in conjunction with a computer (such as with schoolwork or proofreading), it can be a great asset.

Best Family Software at Home

Birrell Walsh: If anyone in your household does research on the Internet, they know how difficult it is to find all the Web pages on a given topic. There are search engines online, but they all seem to have different listings. The time you have for research goes into just finding pointers, and it's gone before you even get to the interesting stuff.

Quarterdeck has recently released WebCompass, and the process is suddenly easier. You tell WebCompass the words to look for. It goes out to seek them on up to thirty-five different search engines all over the Web. It discards the duplicates among the pages it finds, and sends for each and every page. When they arrive, it summarizes the text on each. Then it makes a guess—a pretty good guess—about which pages are closest to what you are looking for. The result is a single prioritized list of pages for you to examine. You can look at the summary or go to the pages themselves, all from within the program. If all this is not enough, you can instruct it to repeat the search at regular intervals. Any time I need to research a topic on the Web these days, I begin with WebCompass.

Birrell Walsh: The people at Intuit were among the first to provide software for home financial management. Over many years they have been getting suggestions for improvements and incorporating them into their programs, until they have a very easy-to-use and complete system for managing household and small-business finances. Quicken 6 has a checkbook from which you control all your accounts. You can keep track of your expenditures, and assign them to different accounts for tax purposes. Quicken also lets you record savings, mortgage and investment transactions. You can keep records of all your finances in one program, make and follow a budget, and even create a debt-reduction plan.



Quicken is cheap ($34.95), I suspect, because Intuit wants you to join and use their Financial Network *(http://www.qfn.com)*. Quicken has software that will do your banking online, although it does not require it. With it you can use the Internet as your main financial tool, doing all your business from your home.

Birrell Walsh: When you first buy a computer, the hard disk seems huge. But a few months later, all the things that you and the kids have stuffed

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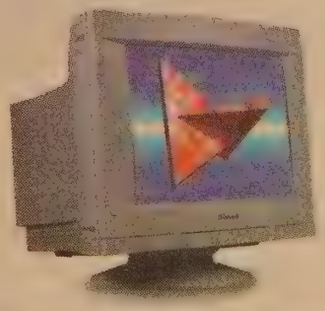

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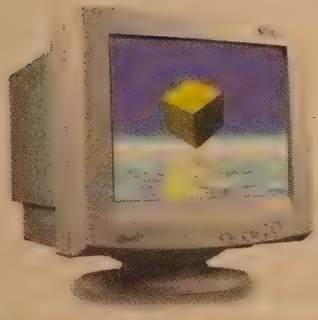

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Top to bottom: The popular Iomega Zip Drive offers a compact and affordable way to back up your files, while the Electric Library offers hundreds of thousands of browsable periodicals for those doing research.

onto the machine have filled it up. Micro Logic may have the answer in a small program called Disk Mapper.

Disk Mapper makes a map of your hard disk. A rectangle on the screen represents all the room you have. Smaller rectangles within it show what is using up the space. I always find that there is a forgotten program on the disk that I can get rid of, reclaiming 10 or 20% of the room. You can delete material from within Disk Mapper. You can also "Zip" to compress files that you don't use often, saving 40–60% of the space they occupy, also from within Disk Mapper. If you want to buy this program, you must get in touch with Micro Logic by telephone or through the Internet *(http://www.miclog.com)*. For some reason they do not seem to market anywhere else.

Birrell Walsh: Someday there will be infinite storage to keep things on our computers and an infinitely big pipe to pass things around the Internet. Until then, we need to compress files. In the world of IBM-compatibles and Windows, PKZip is the compression software of choice. Everywhere we go on the Internet we see ".zip" files made with this technology. We can get software for free to unzip these files, so why would we want to buy zipping software?

For one thing, PKZip can create .zip files as well as open those made by other people. That means that we can save a great deal of space on our hard disks by compressing the files we need to keep but do not often use. I do all my backups by making .zip files. PKZip lets me make one big compressed file that occupies more than one floppy disk. When one is full, the program asks for a new one. Zipped files are also easier to send over the Internet. It is possible to give the zipped files a password, too, so that only a person who knows the password can open it. Between the space you save on your hard disk and the time you save online, PKZip can pay for itself in short order.

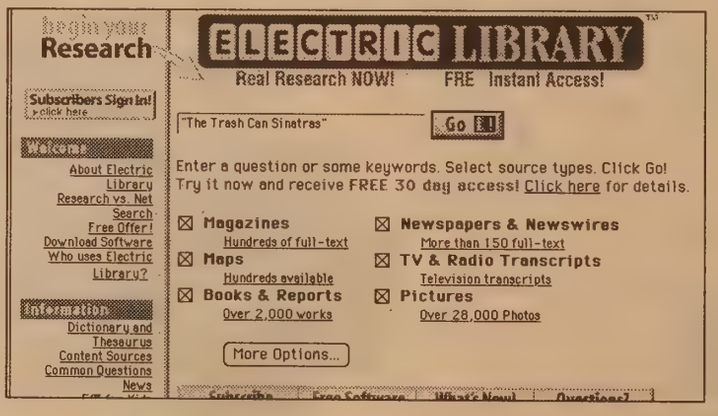
Birrell Walsh: Mac users can find most of the software they need for home, school or small business use with a single purchase. And it is cheap: it costs no more than $129 to buy Claris Works 4 ($129 for new users; $49 for upgrade; $69 for competitive upgrade).

The program is really an integrated suite. It includes a word processor, a spreadsheet, a flat-file database, a painting program, a draw program, and a simple communications module. All the modules are designed to interlock. If you need to have a drawing in your word-processing document, you can insert a frame and do your drawing right in the middle of the text. There are a number of templates included for newsletters, certificates and many other common home and small office uses. Educators in particular seem to enjoy this program; it does almost everything they need for a classroom.

Ed Kahn: If your are new to computers and don't want to spend thousands of dollars on software, consider Microsoft Works 4.0 for Windows 95 ($79.95). This package includes a word processor, spreadsheet, database module and communications package to let you use your modem. If you buy it in the CD-ROM version (recommended) you will also get Bookshelf, a set of reference books that include a dictionary (as opposed to a spell checker), world almanac, zip code directory and a host of other useful references. You may find that this is all the software you need for a long while.

comes with full printed documentation in the box. It also includes a number of templates you can use for newsletters and other publications.

Birrell Walsh: If you have almost any software that does word-processing, spreadsheeting or database work, you can take advantage of Microsoft's offer of a competitive upgrade to Office 97 for Windows for $249. If you do serious office work at home, Microsoft Office for Windows has a complete suite of programs. They are all standards in the business world, so you can exchange files with anyone. Included are Microsoft Word for word processing, the Excel spreadsheet, PowerPoint presentation software, the email and daily planner Outlook, and (in the Professional edition) the Access database. These are all powerful programs, and Microsoft has designed them to work together. If you have a small office in your home, this may be almost all the software you have to buy.



Best Home Office Software

Birrell Walsh: One of the most common uses for a home computer is the small publishing job. We are always getting out a dozen copies of a flyer, or making up a newsletter. The problem is that most desktop publishers cost an arm and a leg. IMSI has stepped into this market with a publisher that is both good and cheap.

IMSI's publisher comes with a full set of layout tools. It has a draw program for Computer Assisted Drawing, and 2000 fonts on a CD. On the same CD are over 20,000 images and 1000 photographs that you can use in your publications. Although many programs only provide documentation on the CD, the IMSI Suite

Birrell Walsh: Macintosh users can obtain what may the best personal organizer available on any platform. Claris Organizer looks, at first blush, like "just another personal information manager." It has a calendar, a database for information about contacts, a note file, and a to-do list.

The program is unusual because of two features: the "category views" and the links. Whenever you enter a task, a date, a note or a new person in the files, you can assign them to one or more categories. Then you can summon just about everything related to a category at one time. Categories might be projects, parts of your busy life, or anything else you want. "Links" let you connect disparate elements together. By putting links from "Make Call to Joe" on the Task List to "Joe O'Donnell" in the Contact Database and "Things to Talk to Joe About" in the Notes, you can gather all the information you need to make that call brief, organized and productive.

Ed Kahn: If you find your desk is cluttered with scraps of paper with information you need, clear

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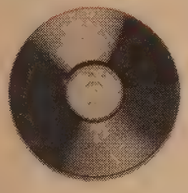

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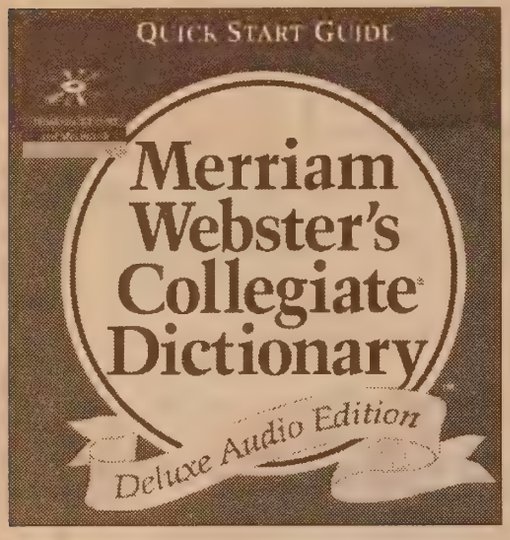
Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary **CD-ROM (left) is simple but powerful educational software, while Kevin Savetz says that the Newton MessagePad 2000 (right) is "arguably the first portable computer that is truly done right."**

the clutter away by installing Info Select ($149.95). This is an amazing piece of software that lets you make little notes on any subject and then find the information in any of a number of ways. If you can't spot the note by the first line index on the left side of the screen, you can hit G



(for get) and then type in any word. You will then have a list of all of the notes that contain that word. I use this all the time when I can't remember a name, but can come up with a key word. I have used this program and its predecessor for years and feel lost without it. It will do lots of other things like dial phone numbers that are in the notes and keep a personal calendar for you.

Ed Kahn: Over the years, I have found that I use my computer for more and more tasks. Keeping an address list with telephone numbers is one of these jobs. If you use AddressMate ($69.95) you will also be able to have your modem dial the phone for you and you will be able to have the program address your envelopes and add a bar code for faster postal delivery. AddressMate does lots of other things in the bargain like let you design and print business cards or any other kind of label. This program works great for creating a mailing list and having all of the envelopes print out. It works in conjunction with a number of word processors so you can automatically bring addresses into your letters and then print both the envelope and the letter with the click of a mouse.

Birrell Walsh: We thought we were careful about computer viruses. I frankly have no idea how we got the Monkey Virus on the computer, but there it was and we needed to get rid of it. A friend suggested a virus-killer that comes all the way from Iceland.

F-Prot is a very small MS-DOS program that fits on one disk. That is important because sometimes you must clean your computer from an uninfected DOS disk. It reached in and extracted the Monkey Virus, quickly and competently on the first try. If you ever allow a disk from another computer to enter your disk drive, if you ever download anything from the Internet, you *must* have an anti-virus program. F-Prot has three virtues: It works. It is small. And it is free for the downloading on the Internet. I strongly recommend that you download it and store it on a disk before you need it.

Birrell Walsh: Got any secrets? If you have any private information at all that must be on your computer or must be sent by Internet, you need a file encryption program. We use PCCrypto from McAfee. It will turn your files into unreadable nonsense with a few simple commands. Only you, or someone you entrust with the password, can recover the file.

The program allows you to make executable files that will decrypt themselves only if the person who runs them provides the right password. Pass "word" might be the wrong expression—passwords can be up to fifty characters long, and can include numbers, letters, symbols and spaces.

As a bonus, PCCrypto includes a utility to wipe sections of your hard-drive. Ordinary "erasure" just marks space as available. The original file is still there, and a skillful user could recover it. PCCrypto's Wipe utility actually writes over the parts of the hard disk where the file was—no trace remains. If you are concerned to preserve your privacy, PCCrypto can help.

Ed Kahn: While there are lots of ways to manage your email, I prefer Eudora Light, which you can get for free by downloading it from their Web site *(www.eudora.com)*. I like this program because it is specifically designed for email rather than as a Web browser and it lets you see your mail in full size covering the entire screen. Replies are easily handled by clicking the mouse. If you want a more sophisticated program, Eudora will be glad to sell you their more advanced Eudora Professional.

Ed Kahn: In the early days of computing, people made fun of computer junkies who needed a computer to balanced their checkbook. These days, there are many reasons to use Quicken Deluxe for Windows ($54.95) in addition to the core feature of reconciling monthly bank statements. The host of features is extensive, but I find it useful to write my checks in the program and then have my printer print the checks for me. There is no chance of entering a different amount in the register than on the check. Also, Quicken remembers checks you have previously written and will complete future entries for you if you like. Recurring monthly checks are a breeze. Come tax time, it is easy to print out a report that will list all of your checks in the proper categories for either you or your accountant. Quicken also ties in with many banks for online banking and tracks stock market and mutual fund investments through your modem. This is also available for the Mac.

Cassidy Allen: I recommended FileMaker Pro for last year's Best Home Office Software, and I'm recommending it again this year. I have no idea how I could stay organized without this database software. Throughout the year here at *MicroTimes*, I use FileMaker Pro to maintain the BBS/User Group/Calendar listings; to keep track of our writer's contact information and their invoices; and to compile our annual *Reseller Guide* (no walk through the park, I can assure you). A great deal of what is eventually printed in this magazine has its origins in FileMaker Pro; the ability to easily and quickly merge the information in a FileMaker Pro database into a word-processing format saves me countless hours of typing and frustration. And this year, we upgraded from FileMaker Pro v2.1 to v3.0, and I was worried that my existing databases would be unadaptable or at least damaged in the transfer process. My fears were unfounded: The database upgrades went along without a hitch.

Best Hardware for Family Computing

Kevin Savetz: It doesn't matter if your computer is a PC or Macintosh—your other computer should be a Newton MessagePad 2000 ($1,100 with keyboard and spreadsheet). The 2000 is arguably the first portable computer that is truly done right. It provides the essentials out of the box: word processor, spreadsheet, address book, email and Web browser, and is eminently upgradable. At a meeting, you can simultane-

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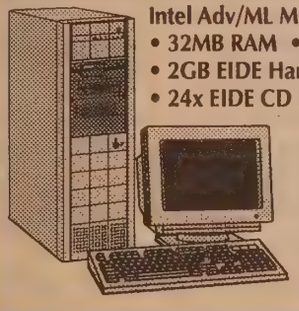

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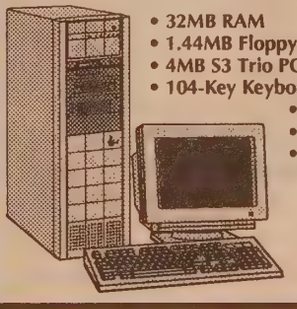

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ously take notes and record sound, then synch the information with your home or office computer. Best of all, the 2000 is truly portable, weighing only a couple of pounds and running for hours on AA batteries.

Its handwriting-recognition is fast (and can even read the chicken-scratch that I call writing) but more importantly you can use a keyboard, firmly pushing this Newton over the line from toy to useful device. The MessagePad is available everywhere Apple computers are sold.

Cassidy Allen: A few years ago, basic digital cameras were prohibitively expensive (ranging from $600–$1,000) and delivered pictures of poor quality when compared to their film counterparts. But now, the market is virtually flooded with digital cameras that offer much better resolution at more accessible prices. Digital cameras are an immediate and creative way for both parents and children to better illuminate and express their ideas on the Internet and on paper. With a digital camera, there's no waiting for the film roll to finish, taking it in for development, waiting for the film to process, paying often exorbitant finishing fees and then bringing it home; you simply point and shoot and then plug the camera into your computer to download the pictures. For budding graphic designers and artists, it's wonderful to be able to shoot a picture and quickly port it into Photoshop for manipulation, and sending a photo of oneself over the Internet is a fast and scanner-free process. In addition, the freedom of not having to worry about "using up all the film" and the resulting development costs also is a boon to spontaneity and creativity.

Ed Kahn: If you have interest in photographic quality color reproduction, consider Epson's new Stylus Photo ink jet printer designed specifically for photography. The results are astounding! There are a number of low-cost color printers on the market, but this one is the best yet for photographic reproduction. It also works well for standard black print. A CD-ROM filled with software to help you edit photographic images comes with the printer. The printer can turn out copies as long as 44". You can print on any paper, but Epson offers a wide range of specialty papers to maximize quality. While the unit sells for nearly $500, it beats the competition for photographic quality prints.

Best Hardware for Home Office

Ed Kahn: I love Co-Star's Label Writer XL Plus label printer. This is a luxury item ($299.95), but increases the use of my computer as it allows me to print virtually any kind of label I want. The same little printer will accommodate labels for addresses, packages, UPS shipments, file folders, videos, floppy disks, and almost any kind of specialty label you can think of. The software that comes with the printer lets you change fonts, include bar code in addresses, print badges and a host of other things.

Ed Kahn: If, after putting together your computer system, you have a little money left in your budget, consider buying a PaperPort Strobe scanner ($299). Visioneer has been making a grayscale scanner for several years, but their Strobe color scanner is a new addition to their line. Any of their scanners let you effortlessly scan anything from a business card to a few columns from a newspaper and then file the image on your computer for easy retrieval. The marvelous thing about the PaperPort system is that you can convert text files to your word processor or send the images as faxes, email, to your printer or into more than 150 different software applications. I use this piece of hardware every day and the new color model opens up a whole new world. Easy to use software comes with the scanner.

Cassidy Allen: Last year, I recommended a scanner with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software; I reinforce that recommendation this year, but specifically point out the amazing Visioneer PaperPort as a must-have in this category. Its ability to quickly and effortlessly scan a document and link it to various programs (word processing, graphics, fax) is a big time-saver for me, particularly with old documents that I need in an editable format but don't have time to retype. With a clean, typed original, the PaperPort is almost 100% accurate in its OCR capabilities; posting a old term paper or story to your Web site is made much easier by this product. To top it off, Visioneer has recently released a color version of the PaperPort, and now offers faxing capabilities over the Internet, eliminating often-expensive fax phone charges. The Visioneer PaperPort is an excellent example of a computer peripheral that is fun to use and that really makes life easier for the user, and after all, isn't that what computers were all about in the first place?

Kevin Savetz: For my money, your best choice for a printer is anything from Hewlett Packard. Which one of their current product line is the best? Frankly, I have no idea—because the HP DeskWriter 550C that I bought five years and two computers ago is still working flawlessly. All too frequently do hardware manufacturers disinherit users of older equipment the minute a new product line is announced. Despite the fact that HP no longer manufacturers that particular model, the company still supports it.

When my little DeskWriter developed a problem feeding paper, one call to HP (with negligible hold time) was all it took for the company to send me a repair kit. The company's Web site *(www.hp.com)* makes finding driver updates easy. Most importantly, the printer has pounded out thousands of article drafts without a whimper.

Best Back-Up Hardware At Home

Fred Lieberman: In every home office, backing up all data ranks high on the list of required but frequently omitted elements. No matter how many times the mantra "back-up your data" is repeated, computer consultants still make a good living rescuing, or attempting to rescue, folks who never did "get around to it."

Storage technology has improved and become so reasonable in price that the task of backing up data is now simple, cheap, and painless. While many perfectly good backup systems and programs are easily available, I would like to make two recommendations: one negative, one positive.

First, do not rely on floppy disks for backup; they are too sensitive to dust, humidity, and temperature fluctuations. Floppy disks seem to get flaky more frequently than hard drives, particularly if they are not used for some time.

Second, for most home office setups the Iomega Zip drive provides a good combination of price, small size, and reliability. A single 100MB cartridge should hold all data files for any small businesses that doesn't deal in heavy-duty graphics. (For example, all of the files related to a 400-page book I have just finished, including several drafts of the manuscript, about 100 interview transcripts, and voluminous correspondence, take up just 15.4MB.)

No special backup program is really needed. Just keep all of your project data files in a "project" partition or folder on your hard disk, and copy the whole folder to the Zip cartridge. For extra safety, use two cartridges, Backup A and Backup B, and write to them on alternate days; that way, even if one of the cartridges should be damaged, you've still lost only one day's work.

Michael Robin: The only real addition to my desktop this year has been the Olympus Sys.230 magneto-optical drive. The Sys.230 uses industry standard, 3.5" MO disks, which are roughly the size of a floppy disk but hold up to 230MB of data. The drive is similar in size to the (100MB)

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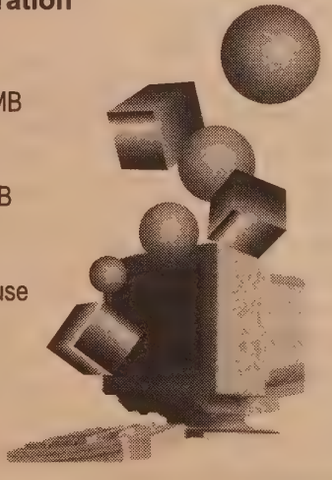

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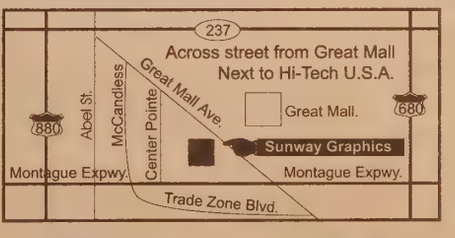

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Iomega Zip drive, except the Olympus comes in a stylish black casing rather than Zip blue. It is compact for travel when needed, lets you easily transfer or archive large files, plus offers an affordable solution for *finally* backing-up your computer. Magneto-optical disks are very rugged, and less susceptible to dust or airport security scans than most other media—making them an excellent choice for travel or storage.

Best Online Service & Resources

Kevin Savetz: The past year has been a tough one for America Online, the largest online service, and although AOL's attitude seems to be "we're past the bad times now," actions speak louder than words, so it's hard to believe them. On the other hand, CompuServe has been quietly perfecting its Internet access and honing its content areas. The price is right, and CompuServe's new 3.0 software brings the interface into the 20th century. For folks thinking about trying the Internet, CompuServe's access is more reliable than some, and just about the fastest you can get.

For new users, the biggest problem with CompuServe is that it's too big—it's been around longer than any of the other online services, and has a forum for everything—from obsolete computers to appliance care. New users should try to stay on the well-lit main roads at first, lest they become overwhelmed.

Cost: $9.95 for 5 hours, additional time $2.95 per hour. Other plans are available.

A favorite reference tool around my office is the Electric Library, at *www.elibrary.com* . This Web site is a searchable database of 1.5 million newspaper articles, 300,000 magazine articles, 1,100 maps, 32,000 television and radio transcripts, and 48,000 images. Although this is a relatively small selection compared to the big research services (like Lexis/Nexis and DIALOG), Electric Library is also considerably less expensive: $9.95 a month or $59.95 a year for an individual subscription.

Subscribers can obtain the full text of any document, making the site incredibly useful for students and researchers who want quick access to a variety of archived information without making a trip to the library.

Michael Robin: Email is still the part of the Net I use the most. However, the ability to connect to the Web and find information I am looking for continues to grow. While no one is surprised that I can find product and corporate information from technology companies on the Web, the number of useful and interesting non-high-tech company-related sites is making the promise of the Web a reality.

My list of favorite sites is always in a state of flux, but my list of favorites includes:

- US Post Office *(www.usps.gov)* - type in an address and get the correct Zip+4 code.
- Dormant Account Web Site *(www.dormantaccounts.ch/)* - this site gives a list of dormant Swiss bank accounts opened by non-Swiss individuals prior to the end of WWII and information needed to file a claim to one of these accounts.
- Corporate Watch *(www.corpwatch.org)* - this Web site works to "expose corporate greed by documenting the social, political, economic, and environmental impacts of transnational corporations."
- Lonely Planet *(www.lonelyplanet.com)* - these are my favorite travel guidebooks. While I have no intention of taking a notebook computer with me on my next vacation just so I can check out this Web site, it offers valuable information when I am trying to decide where to go and when making some plans before I go there.
- CubaWeb *(www.cubaweb.cu)* - while the US government makes it difficult for its citizens to (physically) travel to Cuba, this and other sites let you surf the Web across the Florida Straits to Havana. You can learn about and listen to samples of Cuban music, browse publications, make reservations at popular tourist locations on this sunny Caribbean island, learn about INFOMED (Cuba's medical network), and much more.

Best Advice I Can Think Of

Ed Kahn: When you buy your first computer it is often tempting to buy thousands of dollars of software to go with your powerful system. It is my experience that it is best to buy the simplest program that will do the jobs you want to do. If you are unsure of whether you will like a class of application, buy an entry-level product. You can always move up to a more sophisticated program, but more complex programs are often more difficult to learn to use and may scare you away. After you have played with a simple program, you may find that it does everything that you want to do. Resist the temptation to get a bulldozer where a shovel will do. Remember that today's inexpensive computers are more powerful that the most powerful huge computers of only a few years ago. And today's simple programs are more powerful than the top of the line of a few years back.

Cassidy Allen: So you've learned the basics of Web-page design and you want to post your personal or business page out on the Web for all to see. Good for you! But as you design your page, you're tempted to add lots of big, flashy graphics, ShockWave movies, audio, and animations. It's a natural and understandable temptation, because you want to make your site as attractive and memorable for your visitors as possible, but resist that temptation as much as you can. Remember that everything that you put on your Web site must eventually be downloaded by your visitors onto their computers, and most people in the Internet community (that being the entire world, remember) aren't lucky enough to have T-1 lines, ISDN, 56Kbps modems, Pentiums, PowerPCs, or even digital phone lines. Many people make do with (and are very happy with and grateful for) pre-Pentium/pre-PowerPC computers and 14.4Kbps modems (or slower). Sure, maybe these people (including myself) need to "get with the times" and buy an up-to-date computer and modem, but change is often too hard for some people or just plain too expensive. Design (or redesign!) your site so that it is fast to access and intuitive to navigate. Pages loaded with Java doodads and other eye-candy are nice to look at, but most of the Internet population doesn't have the computing power (or patience) to see them.

Michael Robin: For my day-to-day-work, I continue to use pretty much the same software—Microsoft Word, Claris FileMaker Pro, Netscape Navigator, and Qualcomm Eudora. Have I stayed current with the latest, upgrade versions? Yes and no.

My initial reaction to our belated upgrade to Word 6.0 for the Mac was, "Yes, things are a little different, but it is basically still Word and I should have no major problems adjusting." It is true, I would have adjusted to Word 6.0, but after using it for awhile, I asked myself, "Why?" and returned to Word 5.1. The older version is less cumbersome, more straightforward, and provides me all of the features I need in a word processor.

On the other side of the upgrade coin, the new Eudora Pro 3.1 is well worth the upgrade over earlier version or Eudora Lite. The most notable feature is the ability to check mail at multiple accounts.

Qualcomm recently introduced the Eudora Productivity Toolkit CD-Pack that bundles Eudora Pro 3.1.1 with PGP for Personal Privacy, McAfee VirusScan, Aladdin StuffIt, and Verity KeyView. Each of these tools are useful, but it is PGP that I find the most important. As encryption software, such as PGP, is integrated with more and more software, and more people have the capability to smoothly encrypt and decrypt messages, the cry for truly secure software will continue to grow—putting pressure on the organizations, government agencies, and politicians pushing less secure alternatives.

So far, with FileMaker Pro and Netscape, each upgrade has added functionality while maintaining its ease-of-use. What is there not to like? ■

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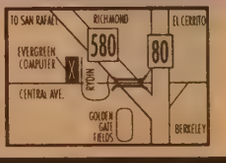

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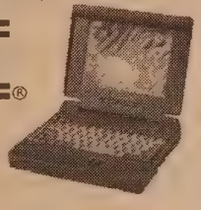

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A Home Office You Can Work In

Whether you're telecommuting or setting up your own home-based business, it's important to set up your home office in such a way that you can be really productive. In this article, Rick Van Dusen raises a few often-overlooked points.

More Than Just The Computer

By Rick Van Dusen

If there's a computer subject hotter than the Internet these days, it's the Home Office. Computer and software vendors are targeting this market big-time. Every computer publication has featured it, and of course, you want to do it.

So you've read about buying a computer, what equipment you need, all about ISDN phone lines—on and on. But what do you need to do to have a place where you can actually work?

As a small office/home office worker for the last thirteen years, I can assure you that all the fancy equipment in the world will not automatically make you productive. I'd like to suggest some things you can do that will help you more than all the technology money can buy.

You must consider three factors in any work situation. In the traditional office someone else worries about them, but at home, you'll have to handle them yourself. I'll discuss them in what I consider to be priority order: ergonomics, aesthetics, and productivity. (These also apply to you if you're a student—or parent of one—setting up a study zone.)

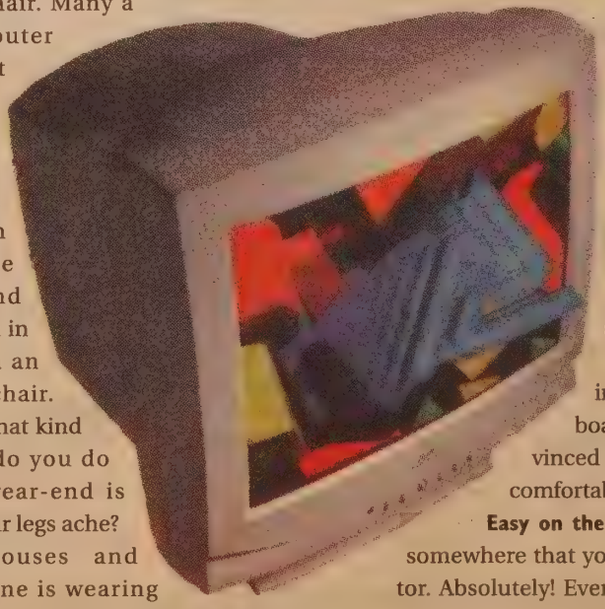
Ergonomics: Comfort That Works

You heard it here first: comfort comes before productivity. That's not the common view. But the fact is, people don't produce effectively until they're comfortable. This is especially so in intellectual work.

The first priority is physical well-being. You should spare no cost in getting adequately comfortable. Look at it this way: What good can you do if your eyes hurt, your back aches, and your wrists are tightening up?

So let's consider first the ergonomics of an office. Ergonomics is the study of human-machine interface. There are things you have to consider in setting up your office so that your interaction with your environment makes you (and your boss) happy. Let's consider where you sit, what you work on, and what you look at.

Watch your backside! The best furniture investment you'll ever make is a quality ergonomic chair. Many a home computer user has spent big bucks for the latest and greatest computer, then dropped it on a yard-sale desk and plopped down in front of it on an old kitchen chair. But tell me, what kind of thinking do you do when your rear-end is numb and your legs ache?



In warehouses and such, everyone is wearing these weight lifter belts to reduce the risk of back injury. An ergonomic chair is the desk worker's equivalent.

Be careful with this purchase. There are a number of chairs, especially in discount stores, that *claim* to be ergonomic. Make sure the one you get has:

- lumbar support,
- full upper-leg support,
- a cushion that is neither squishy nor rock-hard,
- adjustments—the more the better.

Try the chair in the store. Since you'll be parting with anywhere from $100 to $500 (or more!), the store people should be willing to let you spend a lot of time trying different chairs.

As for the type of chair, basically you have a choice of task chairs (without arms and with a low back), or chairs with arms and with different height backs, up to executive-height. Some people prefer the "body balance" chair, where you work in a semi-kneeling position.

Some people prefer to sit in an easy chair with the keyboard on their lap. I'm not convinced this is really productive, or comfortable, long-term.

Easy on the eyes. You've probably read somewhere that you should get a good monitor. Absolutely! Even if your budget is so tight that you have to choose between a fast computer and a good monitor, go with the moni-

The minimum requirements for a healthy SOHO monitor? A 14", 0.28 dot-pitch, non-interlaced model with at least a 70MHz refresh rate.

(Top) An ergonomic keyboard can provide for more comfortable and productive typing; (right) a "body balance" chair can relieve lower-back strain and straighten posture; (left) a well-designed, adjustable standard chair offers important lumbar and upper-leg support.

tor. You'll be staring at the monitor all day, not at the processor chip.

The minimum monitor will have the following specifications:

- 14" display (larger is better, but not an eye-strain issue),
- 0.28 dot-pitch (larger is *unacceptable*),
- a refresh rate of at least 70MHz.

And make sure it's non-interlaced.

But once you get that monitor, make sure you use it properly.

Your monitor should be placed so that you look slightly down from horizontal to view it. A good rule-of-thumb puts the top edge of the viewing area at your eye level. I prefer to have the surface of the screen just about vertical (rather than pointing at my face). I find this keeps the glare down. Either choose a monitor with a glare-reducing screen or get a glare filter.

And put the monitor directly in front of you. Avoid the computer desks that put the monitor off at an angle. It seems like a good way to save deskspace until you have to actually use it, and your neck is twisted all day.

CHAIR PHOTOS COURTESY OF OFFICE STAR PRODUCTS

Environment variables. You can love your new computer or you can hate it; it depends a lot on how you set it up. It takes more than hooking up the wires correctly to put your workstation together. It takes proper placement of the components, especially the monitor, the keyboard, and the mouse.

First, pick a place for your workstation that is well-lighted, but is also free from glare. It's a real pain to work in the dark, but it's just as wearying when you have to keep moving around to see past the glare.

One nice thing about a home office is the possibility of a nice view; just don't let it get in the way of your work. Avoid the direct light hitting the screen at any angle that it reflects to your eyes. And if you wear glasses, avoid any position that puts direct light behind you.

Once you get your monitor in front of you and set just below eye-level and glare-free (as we already discussed), get your keyboard in place. Assuming you are of pretty average height, your keyboard should be on a surface that is 26" from the floor. Check to see that as you type, your upper arms are close to vertical and that your forearms are horizontal. (Your wrists should not be resting on the keyboard, nor should they be bent.) The alpha keys should be centered in front of you.

The mouse should be within easy reach. You should not have to move your chair, reach, or lean to work the mouse.

My pet peeve with the 101- or 104-key keyboard is that when the alpha portion is centered in front of you, the mouse just can't be close enough. It would be great if you can easily arrange it, to have the mouse alongside you, more at your side than in front.

Your chair should be adjusted to put your upper legs level, preferably with your feet flat on the floor. You'll want to be in a position that encourages you to sit up straight. This enables you to breathe better; otherwise you'll get drowsy. Also, it will save strain on your back.

(If you're "tallness-challenged," you may want a foot rest. Choose this option over sitting lower, if you can. In any event, avoid having to look up at the screen.)

Look Good, Feel Good

Everybody needs to attend to the ergonomics; we all have backs, eyes, and other parts that can get tired. But this next area will be more important to some people than others. Aesthetics is the "look-and-feel." I'll discuss the principles here, then you can apply "to taste."

Your work environment should be a place where you feel comfortable, a place you enjoy being in. If it isn't, not only will you have trouble getting yourself there, you'll have trouble getting anything done. So put some importance on setting up and decorating; it will pay off.

Zones. The first principle is to divide your workspace into three zones: Your primary workspace should be right in front of you. If your work is mostly on the computer, aim to have the keyboard and monitor there. Otherwise, this zone will probably be your desktop work area.

The second zone contains things you need to access as your work: the files you're working on, your phone, desktop accessories such as your stapler. These should be in the areas 45 degrees off to the sides.

The third zone is directly in front of you, beyond your workspace. The importance of this zone is in its therapeutic value. Make this area a pleasant place to gaze at. A window is good, or pictures of your family, or a bulletin board or poster. Presently, I have my desk so that I look out a picture window into our sylvan backyard. In a former situation (a small office), I faced a wall with a bulletin board, where I had inspirational quotes and pictures of colleagues and their families. (My job is family-oriented.)

Since I do desktop work much of the time, but I'm on the computer a lot also, I'm set up with two primary zones. Ninety degrees from my desktop is a table with my computer.

The table top is large enough to hold the keyboard and mouse at 26", and the rest of the computer at standard table height (29"). Then I use the corner of my desk as a shared secondary zone (the one that holds my phone, so I can reach it when I'm on the computer or at the desk).

To switch workstations, I simply swivel in my chair.

If you're messy, be neat about it. I happen to be one of those who believes there are two types of office workers: those who do meaningful work at their desks, and those who keep their desks neat. Many people, though, couldn't stand my clutter.

Whether you work best with an empty desk or buried deep, it's essential that you are organized. By this I mean that you know what's where, that your energy is not being wasted in looking for things or in frustration.

Put a value on time spent organizing, re-filing, cleaning (or even "pile management"). Like sharpening your ax, it's time well-invested.

Your work area should have a place for everything and everything in its place. Things should be where they can be used, and where their

placement makes sense to you. Take the time to think out your arrangement. Then take the time to actually do the arranging!

Pretty is as pretty does.

Enjoy your environment and you'll be happier. Use clean and bright paint, wallpaper, posters, pictures, whatever. Suit your taste. Unlike in the corporate headquarters, you are not restricted to gray and mauve.

Productivity

In your home office, there's no boss looking over your shoulder. Nor is there any pressure to "look busy." You're stuck with actually having to produce real work.

So you need to give some serious thought and planning to how you will organize your work. See if you can describe your approach to work.

What do you do? What types of work are a part of your day? Do you deal with mail, write letters, write articles, etc.? Do you need heavy-thinking time? What about routine paper pushing? How about phoning? And don't forget organizing.

If your primary function is, say, creative writing, your needs will be different from those of, for instance, a medical transcriber.

How do you do? Describe your daily cycle. Are you a real morning person? Or are you only half there until noon? Do you have a mid-morning or mid-afternoon energy slump? When can you do your best thinking, have the most concentration? When are you most ready to organize, file, or tackle the routine paperwork?

What do you live with? What constraints are imposed on you? What time blocks do you need to set aside for phone contacts? If you're a telecommuter, what times are committed to mandated activity (teleconferencing, for example)?

Depending upon your particular situation, you may be very flexible in your hours, or you may be required to be available at certain hours. As much as you can, choose the hours that suit you best.

Your daily schedule may also be affected by "environment variables." What family events impact your work? When is the house quiet? When is it noisy?

(Another bit of "furniture" that's important if you want to be productive is a closed door. This is your workplace. It needs to be defined, physically, as such. Yet even when you've been careful to lock yourself away from the living quarters, it's unrealistic to think you'll be totally insulated from the family.)

You just have to live with it!

Now schedule to suit. Match your times and strengths with your duties. Don't plan to do your phoning when the gardener is outside your window. Don't expect to concentrate on a heavy project during your neighbor's weekly wild party.

Researchers tell us that intellectual workers need about 20 minutes to recover their concentration after an interruption. Try to schedule your mundane tasks during times when you're most likely to be interrupted. Find the quietest times for concentration-intensive tasks. (That's one reason why computer programmers usually keep weird hours.)

It's An Investment!

So make an investment! Spend the time and money to set up your home office in a way that gives you the best results.

Get physically comfortable, and set up your workspace so that you like being there, and structure your time to best advantage. That's an investment that's sure to pay off. ■

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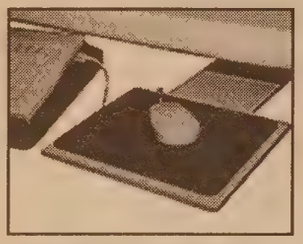

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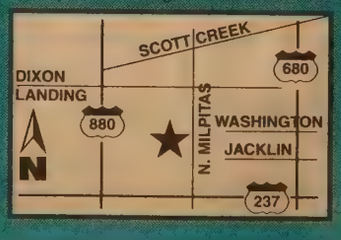

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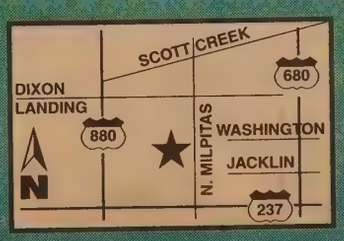

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Telecommuting

It's Not All Wine And Roses

By Robert Moskowitz

Even Cathy of the comic strip is telecommuting from her home office these days; despite entrenched skepticism, it's becoming an increasingly common practice and stands to benefit employers and employees alike. However, a successful telecommuting experience requires serious groundwork, and in this article, *MicroTimes* Telecommuting columnist Robert Moskowitz offers sage advice about avoiding pitfalls.

For years, people without much vision for the future ignored telecommuting, or considered it nothing more than an interesting novelty. Yet the telecommuting movement has prospered, and today tens of millions of hard-working people all over the world accomplish significant portions of their work without having to travel to a central location to do it.

But telecommuting is not all wine and roses. Most organizations find that allowing some of their people to work via telecommuting creates or exacerbates at least a few difficulties, drawbacks, and problems. Fortunately, most of these can be avoided or minimized by early planning, so it's important to be aware of these potential sore points.

Here is a brief rundown of the most common problem areas for telecommuters, and some practical remedies:

Special Difficulties For Telecommuters

Most people who become dissatisfied with telecommuting, it turns out, discover their dissatisfaction very quickly after they begin. Since most telecommuting is voluntary, anyone who doesn't like telecommuting can easily return to his or her previous commuting schedule.

That's why the overwhelming majority of telecommuters claim not only to be very satisfied with their work schedules, but very unhappy at the idea of reverting to full-time work in a central office.

Nevertheless, even the most satisfied telecommuters can face a few special difficulties caused specifically by their novel work regimen.

Stress: Occasionally, telecommuters experience too much personal stress or unhappiness within their new work schedules. Most often, this results from the company's failure to evaluate prospective telecommuters well enough before thrusting them into a telecommuting situation.

Feelings of inadequacy, distress, or uncertainty that aren't severe enough to create problems when working in a conventional office can escalate into personal unhappiness and drastically lowered productivity for a person who starts telecommuting too many days per week. The situation gets worse when there's no easy way for the new telecommuter to save face and return to a conventional commuting schedule.

Training Deficiencies: Some of the most common difficulties for new telecommuters occur when the individual doesn't receive adequate training about how to telecommute successfully.

After all, almost everyone working today grew up in an environment where commuting to a central workplace was the defining characteristic of the work week. It's only natural that newly inaugurated telecommuters would need a little time to learn and develop the few special traits they need to perform effectively while away from the central office.

Today, most organizations recognize the need to prevent temporary problems by providing some kind of relevant training before sending an office-bound worker out to become a telecommuter. But in the all-too-frequent cases where such training is deficient, both the telecommuters and the organization can suffer until they eventually regain their equilibrium.

The basic skills for new telecommuters and their immediate supervisors include:

- time management,
- goal setting, and
- consciously maintaining contact with coworkers and supervisors still working in the office.

Many telecommuters also benefit from basic training in how to use the computers, faxes, modems, cellular phones, and other high-technology equipment they'll be working for the first time. In the absence of adequate training,

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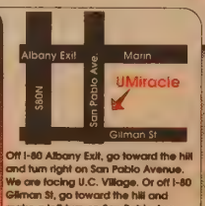

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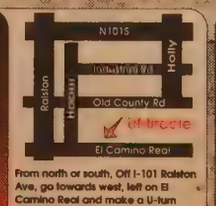

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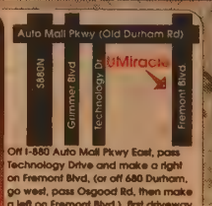

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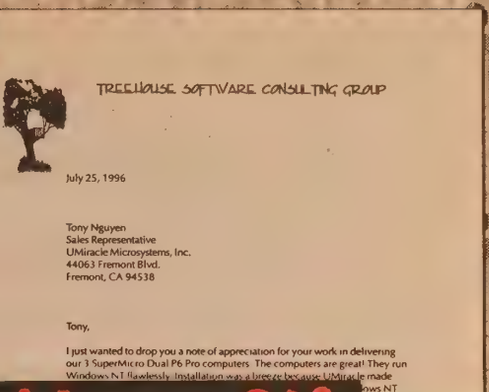
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(Telecommuting continued from page 34)

this kind of equipment can leave anyone feeling helpless and unable to cope.

Career Derailment: Special career problems can also arise for telecommuters who don't take proactive steps. Generally speaking, however, the problems are few and far between.

For example, the facts show that most telecommuters remain as promotable as they were before they began working outside the traditional office. And many telecommuters report they receive more and better recognition for their efforts than coworkers who don't telecommute.

Far from career "derailment," some telecommuters consider their ability to work from home one or more days per week a form of reward and a "promotion" they greatly appreciate.

In addition, frequent telecommuting gives you opportunities to learn new skills and increase your productivity. Also, telecommuting is highly visible to others in the organization, and may bring telecommuters into prominence.

However, no one can easily dismiss the lingering fear that being out of the office will leave you out of the loop for new projects and for other well-earned recognition or rewards. The only remedy for this is to make sure that you keep others informed of your actions, triumphs, and capabilities.

Reluctant managers can often justify their self-fulfilling beliefs about telecommuting through spurious cost/benefit calculations.

Union Responses

Telecommuters uniformly appreciate the opportunity to cut down on their physical travel. But labor organizations are not so comfortable with telecommuting, and have expressed widely differing reactions to it, ranging from relative indifference to very strong opposition. No union has yet expressed positive feelings about telecommuting, but with new efforts to organize telecommuters now on the horizon, this may change fairly soon.

In an effort to curtail or undercut the appeal of telecommuting, a few union representatives have advocated rules that would select telecommuters for their seniority rather than their personal preferences, suitable temperament, job responsibilities, work history, or other—clearly more relevant—criteria.

One union even reacted to telecommuting proposals by claiming that the easier commutes and the posh suburban telecommuting workplaces are unfair advantages given only to people in a few highly favored job classifications.

A few union representatives still fear the development of telecommuting, uncertain about how to react to its disruption of the traditional centralized workplace that gave rise to unions in the first place. They're worried that telecommuting might become part of a management strategy to convert full-time workers with benefits into part-time workers receiving lower wages and fewer benefits.

At first, union officials declined invitations to

continued on page 42

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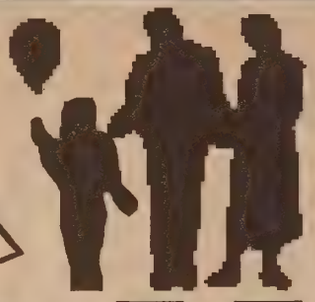

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(Telecommuting continued from page 38)

attend telecommuting briefings and planning sessions. But the more closely unions and management work together to develop telecommuting programs in an organization, the fewer problems tend to arise.

One good example can be found in Japan, where unions generally have a very cooperative relationship with organizations. Here, telecommuting has generated no serious labor conflicts. Within Nippon Telephone & Telegraph, for example, unions support the concept of telecommuting, and have negotiated an arrangement whereby telecommuters retain their basic perquisites—such as travel allowances—they might otherwise have had to give back.

Technological Inadequacies

Voice Communications: Fundamentally, successful telecommuting requires only a telephone, a form of technology that is readily available everywhere people are likely to work in California. And if more mobility becomes necessary, a cellular telephone easily keeps you in touch with the office from deserts, street corners and highway rest-stops.

Data Communications: But in practice, many telecommuters can accomplish their work only with access to company data available exclusively in the office computer. This includes managers, programmers, data workers, and many others. Even telecommuters who don't actually need such data access still want to have it, in order to accomplish their most important work while away from the conventional office.

The result is a serious problem of compatibility for organizations that use more than one or two different computer systems and software applications. It's easy for this situation to quickly become a major obstacle to widespread telecommuting. To avoid this, organizations must spend a lot of time gearing up for telecommuting, and must allocate sufficient resources toward taking the steps necessary to guarantee that data can flow to and from the workers easily and efficiently at any distance.

Communications Costs: Because electronic communication is rarely free, the cost of both telephone conversations and dial-up computer connections between the telecommuter and the central office can grow quite large. Attending a meeting by speaker phone, for example, can easily require 30 minutes or longer. And even with the fastest of today's modems, it's common to spend an hour a day sending and receiving important data files.

When phone calls to the home office—typically 20 or 30 miles away —cost $10 to $20 per hour, every telecommuter can run up a three-figure phone bill every month.

Despite the advent of fiber optic and ISDN telephone networks, the costs of telecommuter's communications aren't coming down. While domestic and even some international long-distance rates have collapsed in recent years, we haven't seen much relief from middle-distance phone charges, and may not for several more years.

These extra costs and difficulties can startle a management team that hasn't considered them in preparing to roll out telecommuting to a wider cross-section of the organization's employees.

Data Security

The fear of precious data being lost or stolen is quite real, and a good reason to limit the kind of

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information that's available to an organization's telecommuters.

But before letting this problem scuttle a telecommuting program, remember that the very same organizations worried about data security problems due to telecommuters frequently leave the same "valuable" data lying around the conventional office in far more vulnerable situations. Disks, or binders, are often left on desks where unescorted visitors can pick them up and review or even copy them without being challenged. Reports often leave the office in the custody of employees who have no idea how to keep them secure. Computers and terminals tied into important networks are frequently left unattended, with the required passwords already entered.

While telecommuters should be alert to and trained in data security issues, it's rarely telecommuters who make the mistakes that compromise the organization's future.

Family And Home Life Problems

One of the most worrisome problems for telecommuters—and sensitive organizations—is the very real potential for telecommuting to create new problems for an individual's family and home life.

For most telecommuters and their families, the boundary between home and work tends to blur. There are cases of telecommuters who suffer from overwork, workaholism, and unwanted interruptions during meals and at all hours of the day or night.

Employees and their families may also suffer from the added pressures that telecommuting can bring to family life. For example, a telecommuter working at home during business hours may have trouble and feel guilty over deciding whether or not to help with a crying baby, do the laundry, run to the store for a bottle of milk, or lay the table for dinner.

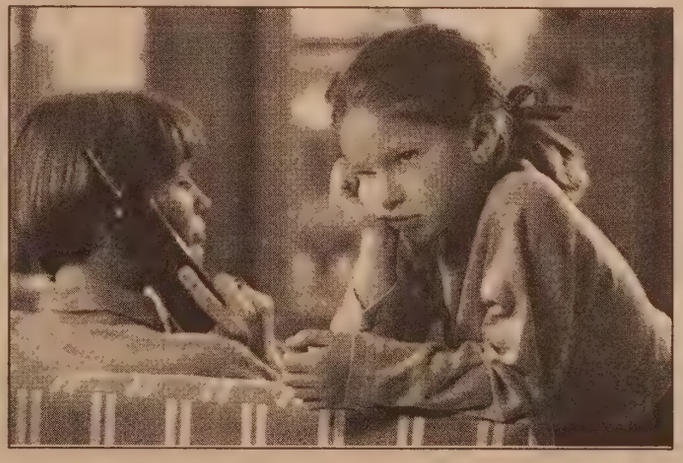
Everyone appreciates that telecommuting translates commuting time into time with the family. But few people are entirely comfortable ignoring family members in the next room just to clock a full day's work.

Naturally, these problems are easier to deal with when the telecommuter commutes to a satellite center in the neighborhood or works from a car while on the road, rather than staying at home to work.

But there's no denying that switching to telecommuting one or more days per week is likely to raise one's family's expectations and quality of life, particularly for any little children in the family, making it very difficult to go from regular telecommuting back to the daily commute.

Managers Lack Enthusiasm For Telecommuting

This remains one of the most common obstacles to the further spread of telecommuting programs. In fact, many individuals are reluctant to ask for permission to telecommute because they're afraid that management antipathy will cause the mere inquiry to be seen as a sign of malingering.



Everyone appreciates that telecommuting translates commuting time into time with the family. But few people are entirely comfortable ignoring family members in the next room just to clock a full day's work.

But no one should discount the power of management reluctance to experiment with telecommuting. It often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, organizations filled with managers who are reluctant to support telecommuting often experience problems with telecommuting in the few places where it does get tried.

In other negative situations, an organization may not even try telecommuting until every other option has been exhausted.

Managers will rarely admit they have a stubborn reluctance to accept telecommuting. Instead, they will put forward a heavy barrage of mistaken assumptions, unwarranted fears, and bogus concerns that seem plausible at first. Only later will it come out that the real reason telecommuting got put on a back burner was that management had little enthusiasm for the idea.

Among the commonly held, but decidedly incorrect beliefs about telecommuting you'll find in reluctant managers is the notion that telecommuting programs cost a lot to get going, and that the payoffs from telecommuting won't be both measurable or noticeable for many years. Other reluctant managers still feel that telecommuting remains an unproven strategy, one that entails a lot of risk for very little in the way of benefits. Given a choice of whether or not to let some of their employees try telecommuting, these managers prefer to delay or to kill the idea altogether.

Reluctant managers can often justify their self-fulfilling beliefs about telecommuting through spurious cost/benefit calculations. One of the most common mistakes is to underestimate the true financial and productivity costs generated by existing problems and difficulties, and ignore or underestimate the benefits that telecommuting might bring.

Whenever you check a cost/benefit analysis of telecommuting, make sure it factors in such elements as the time and expense savings from not commuting to work, the health penalties not paid by workers spending time in polluted, crime-ridden, high-stress office locations, and the productivity not lost to the distractions and noise of conventional office arrangements.

Although the emphasis has been on problems associated with telecommuting, that's not the end of the story. Years of actual observations of telecommuters' experiences provide a significant pool of knowledge from which to draw not only solutions, but strategies for avoiding the problems in the first place.

Thus organizations that begin to offer a telecommuting option today need not experience the same difficulties, or overcome the same complexities, as organizations that turned to telecommuting a decade or more ago.

By learning from past problems, organizations can plan a smoother path toward telecommuting success, and dramatically improve the quality and quantity of results they obtain from their telecommuting programs. ■

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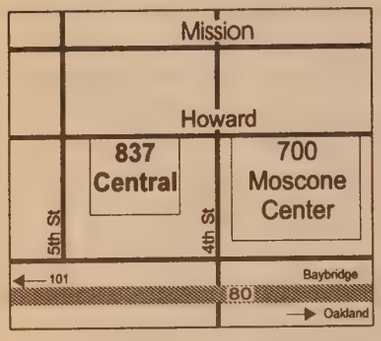

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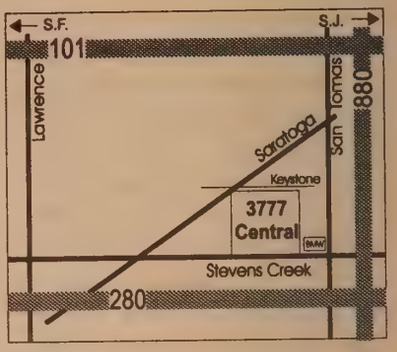

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320LX accessories: - (F1218A) AC Adapter ... 29.99
- (F1223A) Synch Cable 16
- (F1224A) Spare Cradle 32
- (F1225A) Stylus 12
- (F1227A) Leather Case 68
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- 4MB CF Card / w. adapter 119/49

IBM

TP560: P-133, 8MB, 2.1GB
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w. 11.3" DSTN..... 1899
TP760ED : P-133, 16MB, 2.1GB, 6X CD, 12.1 TFT and Win95 3995
TP760EL: P-133, 32MB, 2.1GB, 12.1" TFT 4645
TP760XD: P166MMX, 32MB, 3GB, 8X CD, 28.8 modem, 12.1" TFT 4895
TP760XL: P-166MMX, 16MB 2.1GB, 12.1" TFT. 3899

KEYTECH USA

KB6280: 16MB, 2.1GB, 12.1" TFT, 11X CD, w. P166Mhz / P200Mhz 2525/2595
w. P166MMX / P200MMX 2595/2825
KB6280: 16MB, 2.1GB, 12.1" DSTN, 11X CD, w. P166Mhz / P200Mhz 1985/2075
w. MMX-166Mhz / MMX-200Mhz 2065/2295
Windows 95 CD 90

MAXTECH (GVC)

753TS: 8MB, 1.3GB, 8X CD, support TV video, 11.8" TFT w. P133Mhz / P166Mhz 2125/2295
Upgrade to 12.1" TFT ..... add 280

RIX

AP6400: 16MB, 2.1GB, 11X CD, 12.1" TFT,
- P133 / P166 / P166MMX 2485/2565/2635
822: P-133, 16MB, 1.3GB, 6X CD, Win'95,
- w. 11.3" DSTN / 11.3" TFT 1665/1995

SCEPTRE

S3900: 8MB, 1GB, 11.3" DSTN, Win'95,
- P100 / P133 / P150 ..... 1395/1495/1595
S4000: 8MB, 1GB, 12.1" TT, 10X CD, Win'95, Li-Ion,
- P100 / P133 / P150 ..... 2295/2385/2475
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- w. 16MB / 32MB RAM built-in ..... add 75/195
S4500: P166MMX, 16MB, 12X CD, 33.6 Modem, Li-Ion, 12.1" TFT 1.3GB / 2GB HDD..... 3295/3395

TOSHIBA

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Satellite 220CDS: P-133, 16MB, 1.4MB, 10X CD, 12.1" DSTN 1999
Satellite 430CDT: P-120, 16MB, 1.3GB, 10X CD, 11.3" TFT 2295
Satellite Pro 440CDT: P133MMX, 1.4GB, 16MB, 10X CD, 12.1" DSTN 2999
Tecra 500CDT: P-120, 16MB, 1.2GB, 12.1" TFT, 6X CD, 28.8 modem 2475
Tecra 510CDT: P-133, 16MB, 2.1GB, 12.1" TFT, 10X CD, 28.8 modem 2999
Tecra 730XCDT: P-150MMX, 16MB, 2.1GB, 6X CD, 28.8 modem, 12.1" TFT 3699
with docking station 4195
Tecra 740CDT: P-166MMX, 16MB, 2.1GB, 10X CD, 28.8 modem, 13.3" TFT 5195
with docking station 5750

TWINHEAD

Slimnote 9133T: P-133, 12.1"TFT, 10XCD,Win'95,16MB,33.6Modem w. 1.3GB HDD 2675
w. 2.1GB HDD 2845
(upg to 32 frm 16MB)... 2995
Slimnote 9133V: P-133, 1.3GB, 11.3" DSTN, 16MB, 10X CD, Win'95 1845
Upgrades:
- 16MB RAM add-on ..... add 195
- w. 11.3" TFT ..... add 525
- Lithium Ion Battery ..... add 100
Slimnote 9150T: P-150, 12.1" TFT, 2.1GB, 32MB RAM, Win'95, 10X CD, Li-Ion 2995
Slimnote 9166T: P-166MMX, 12.1" TFT, 2.1GB, 32MB, 33.6 modem, 10X CD, Win'95, Li-Ion ... 3145
- upgrade LCD 1024x768 ..... add 300

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Palm Pilot Professioanl 1MB 369
- Belt Crip Case 24
- Cradle for Windows 29
- Deluxe Leather Case 58
- Palm Pilot Modem 129
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*Pilot 1000 Pocket Organizer ..... *(199)*
*Pilot 5000 Pocket Organizer ..... *(235)*
*- 1MB upgrade ..... *(99)*
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Kensington Port: MicroSaver 39.95
Port: DEFCOM I (motion-sensor) 49

DESKTOP SYSTEMS

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Bravo MS5166M 2000C/95: P166MMX, 32MB, 2GB, 16X CD, Win 95 1550
Bravo LC6233 2000C/95: PII233, 32MB, 2GB, 16X CD, Win95 2150

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Venturis FX2: P166, 16MB, 2GB, 12X CD, Win 95 1550
Prioris XL6200: Pro200, 32MB, 2GB, 12X CD Win 95 2750

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Vetra XA/200MT (D4776N): Pro200, 32MB, 2.5GB, Ethernet 10/100, 8X CD, Win NT 4.0... 2950

IBM

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200XL: PII233, 32MB, 2.5GB, 16X CD, Win 95 . 2050
300XL: PII266, 32MB, 4.3GB, 16X CD, Win NT . 2650

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Delphi / upgrade..... 499/249
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-competitive upgrade for Win ..... *(45)
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-upgrade 95
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WinFax Pro 7.0 for Win 95 -FD/CD 79/79
WinFax Pro Starter Kit (server + 2 notes)..... 265

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cc:Mail 6.0 10-user Client Pack..... 559
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SNA NT Workstation 199
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Visual Fox Pro Standard 3.0 for Win..... 189
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Windows NT 4.0 Server Resource Kit 109
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Music Central 96 - CD oem / reg 22/37
NBA Full Court Press - CD..... 37
Office Prof. 4.3 CD (oem) w/ book..... 135/149
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Office 97 Prof (oem) ..... *(245)
Office 97 Standard (oem) ..... *(185)
Space Simulator - CD..... *(39.95)
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Sound Blaster 32 IDE PNP oem 79
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NEC
CDR-1610 16X SCSI Int oem 149
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KXL-783A 8X CD PCMCIA 389

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DVD101 IDE Int 199
DVD301 SCSI Int 399

PLEXTOR
PX-12CSi 12X SCSI Int (Caddy) 259
PX-20X SCSI Int (Tray) 245

SONY
CDU-511 16X IDE Int 95
CDU611 24X IDE Int 109
PRD-650 Portable 6X w. PCMCIA Kit 345

TEAC
524E 24X IDE Int 109
CD-516S 16X SCSI Int 159

TOSHIBA
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XM6102B 24X IDE Int 105
XP3801 15X SCSI Int 145

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Philips CDD-2600 Int / Ext ($200 Rebate) ... 665/785
Ricoh CDR-6200S 2X/6X Int 545
Pioneer/Traxdata CDR 74 min. / 10-pk 4.50/43
Yamaha CDR-400 6X/4X Int / Ext 745/865

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Yamaha YST-M7 (5W) / YST-M15 (10W) 45/75

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MPA3026AT 2.6GB 10ms 128k, 5400rpm, IDE .. 209
M2954SYU 4GB 8ms 512k, 7200rpm, SCSI-2 .. 569
M2954QAU 4GB 8ms Ultra-Wide SCSI 629
M2949SYU 9GB 10ms 512k SCSI ..... *(1155)

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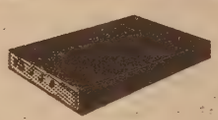

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PM336HC 33.6 Fax Int 85
PM336MT 33.6 Fax Ext 119

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XJ1366 PCMCIA 33.6 Flash upgradable . *(209)
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XJ4288M PCMCIA Fax, w.Motorola cable 249
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Sportster 56K Int / Ext 165/185
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Total Control Modem Pool/8 2950

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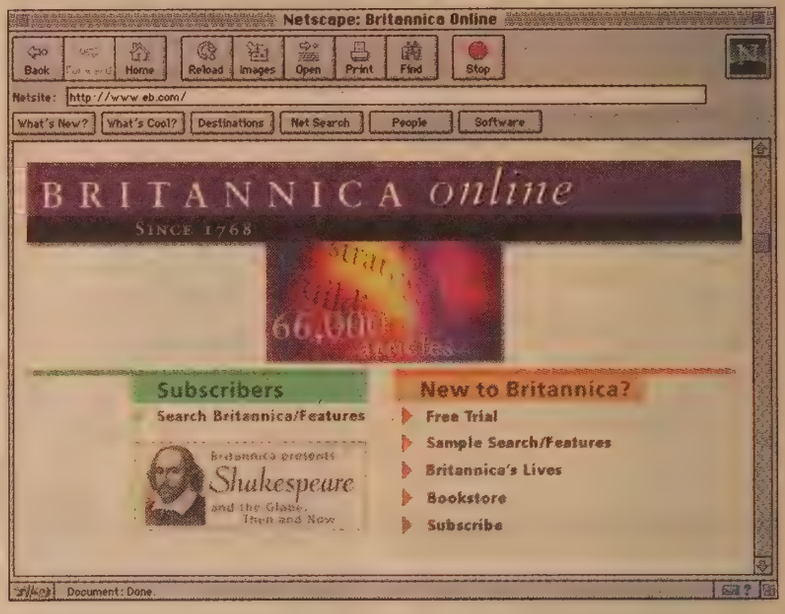
Using The Internet In Your Home Business

Reasons To Go Online

By Kevin M. Savetz

Maybe you think your home-based business doesn't need the Internet—and maybe you're right. But don't dismiss the idea just because your business is gardening, or pet-sitting, or catering, or something equally non-technical. In this article, Kevin Savetz offers some reasons to reconsider that decision not to go online.



A few weeks ago, I was waiting for a friend to finish his training session at a martial arts studio. As I watched the students practice their movements, I heard from the back office the familiar sound of a modem making a connection. The proprietor of the business was connecting to the Internet. But, for what? What use could a martial arts studio—a place that teaches people to harness their power as humans—have for harnessing the power of the Internet? For a moment, the two elements seemed worlds apart.

The truth is, there are dozens of reasons for any business—including a home-based operation—to access the Internet. Your business doesn't need to be in a technology field; if you think that your business is too far entrenched in the "real world" to get something useful from Internet access, you may be surprised to find out the ways that businesses like yours are using the Net.

With that in mind, here are some ideas of ways you can utilize the Net in your business.

Desktop Publishing Resources

Do you publish a newsletter, flyers or create your own advertising? The Internet is full of archives of clip art and fonts that you can download and use to spice up your publications.

For instance, ArtToday (*http://www.arttoday.com*) offers more than 500,000 pieces of clip art—from stock photographs to line art. Easy to search, ArtToday makes it simple to find the perfect art. Unlimited access to graphics from ArtToday costs $9.95/month.

Likewise, the Internet is home to many font archives. You can buy professional-quality fonts from companies like Bitstream (*http://www.bitstream.com*) and have them delivered to your computer and ready to use in a matter of minutes. Free fonts abound, too, from sources such as Fontaholics Anonymous (*http://home1.gte.net/tiaralyn/Fotaholics_Anonymous.htm*).

Electronic Mail

It's easy to overlook electronic mail, but email is an Internet tool that has revolutionized the way businesses communicate.

You may be inclined to brush off email as a tool that doesn't fit into your business, but many businesses have found that this tool can be an integral part of communications. If not between you and your customers, then between employees who work in other locations.

Electronic mail can often convey more detail more clearly than a voice-mail message. Because it allows you to read and answer messages on your terms, email reduces the number of times you end up "playing phone tag" with others.

Research

If your businesses takes you to the library for research, the Internet may be able to help you do the job from your desk. For example, Britannica Online is the online version of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (*http://www.eb.com*), available by monthly ($12.50) or annual ($150) subscription. And the Electric Library offers a database of 1.5 million newspaper articles and 300,000 magazine articles (*http://www.elibrary.com*).

The Perry-Castaneda Map Collection holds more than 2,100 public domain maps covering every area of the world (*http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html*). Another useful research tool is Switchboard (*http://www.switchboard.com*), a humongous online phone book replete with the names, phone numbers and addresses of millions of individuals and businesses across the US.

Computer Support

If you already use a computer for your business, the Internet can help you make better use of it. If your accounting software or word processor isn't working like it should, you can use the Internet to get help from that company's Web site, or send an electronic mail message to their support team for assistance. This can be quicker—and a whole lot less frustrating—than making a long-distance phone call then waiting on hold for hours for technical support.

Many computer companies make their software updates available on the Internet—often for free. So if you need to upgrade your copy of QuickBooks or Microsoft Word to the latest version, all it takes is a trip to that company's Web

Above: The online version of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* offers all that the hardbound original does for $12.50 per month.

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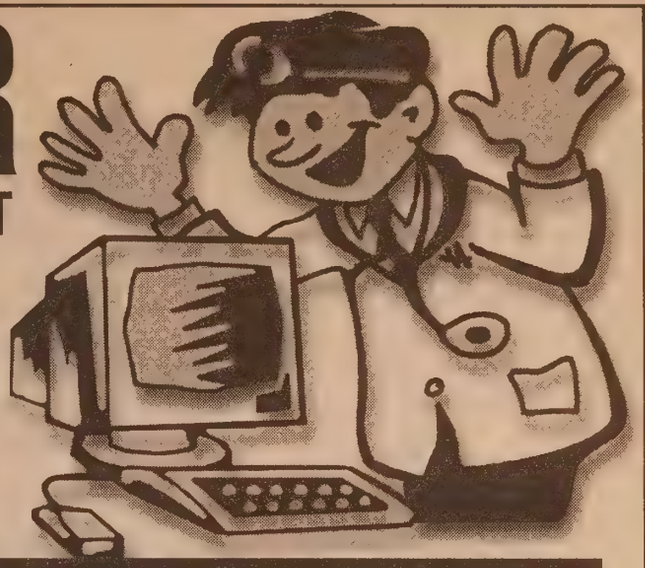

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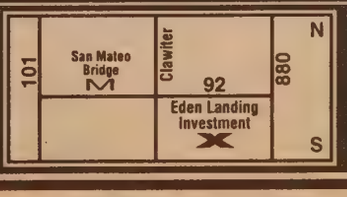

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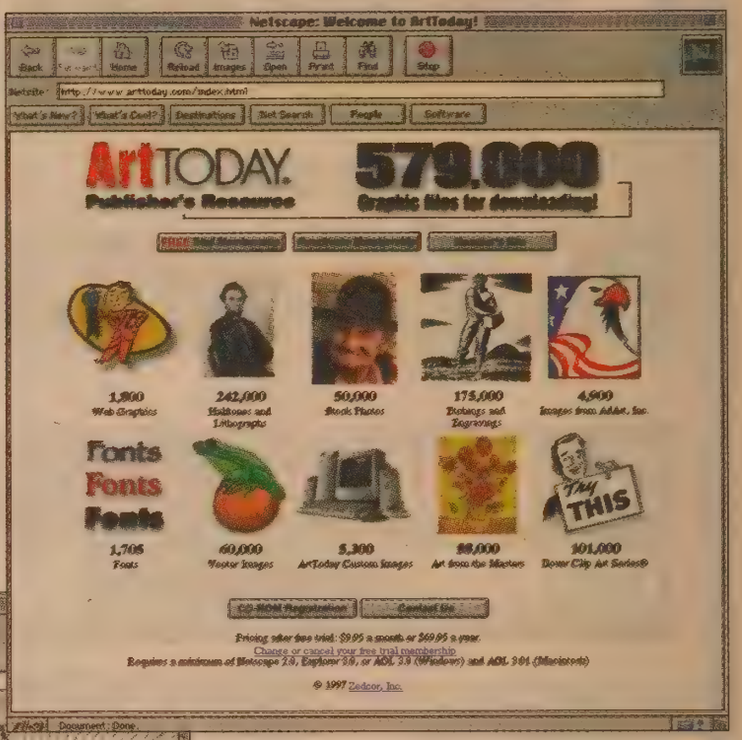


The Perry-Castaneda Map Collection Web site (left) provides more than 2,000 public-domain maps from all over the world, while the ArtToday Web site (right) delivers over 500,000 pieces of clip art for $9.95/month.

site in order to download the upgrade. Hardware manufacturers, too, make upgrades available on the Internet, from printer drivers to "flash-ROM" modem upgrades.

Sites such as *www.versiontracker.com* and *www.versionmaster.com* take the effort out of finding out if your software is up-to-date: The Internet can help make the software your business already uses work better.

Get Government Information

The Small Business Administration is no stranger to many businesses, and this is just one government agency that provides wholly useful information on the Internet. Its Web site (*http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov*) offers an online workshop on developing a business plan, and information on starting, financing, and expanding your business.

If your business involves creating something—whether it's watches, wall art or widgets—two more government Internet sites can be invaluable to you. The US Copyright Office (*http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/*) and the US Patent & Trademark Office (*http:// www.uspto.gov*) serve up just about everything you'll need to know about using legal means to hold on to the work that you have created.

The Better Business Bureau also has a Web page, where you can get answers to common questions about the BBB, access consumer buying guides and business publications, and even file a complaint against a business that has done you wrong (*http://www.bbb.org*).

Set Up A Web Site

Your business can have a Web site of its own, of course. If created well and properly promoted, a Web site can build name recognition for your company and bolster business. For some businesses, even ones that have nothing to do with computers, having a Web page is becoming as desirable as having an ad in the Yellow Pages.

Online advertisements are easier to change than print ads. Some businesses are experimenting with letting Internet users print out coupons, which saves paper vs. mailing out reams of flyers.

Find a reputable local company that can create and host your company's Web site. You can do it yourself (if you have the time), but the benefits of having a knowledgeable "Webmaster" set up your site far outweigh the monetary cost. The trick is to make the site useful—not just an online ad—and then find a way to ensure that Internet users in your geographic area will know about the site.

Check Up On Your Competition

Not to sound callous, but if your competition has a Web site, you can use the Internet to see what they're up to: Read the press releases that they post and find out what they are charging for their products.

In the same vein, you can use the Internet to see what your customers are saying about you. If your company sells products that are used around the nation or world, chances are good that Internet users occasionally talk about your product. For instance, you can use a search tool like *www.reference.com* to find out if folks have mentioned your company in newsgroups. You may do your company some good by finding out what people are complaining about and using that information to smooth your customers' ruffled feathers.

Small Business Support

The Net is home to plenty of resources for owners of small businesses and home offices. For instance, the Small & Home-Based Business Links site offers annotated links to Internet sites focused on home-based franchises, business opportunities, reference material, marketing, and services for small business (*http://*

The Small Business Journal's Web site has a "corpulent archive of back issues" available to small entrepreneurs hoping to grow their businesses.

www.ro.com/small_business/homebased.html). And The Idea Cafe offers scores of articles, interviews and information for small business owners. Idea Cafe's mission is to help entrepreneurs succeed in reaching their business and personal goals (*http://www.ideacafe.com*).

The Small Business Journal is a print magazine "dedicated to the growing business." Its Web site, *www.tsbj.com*, offers a corpulent archive of back issues, with articles that will help you learn what you customers really think of you and how to eliminate your fear of the IRS.

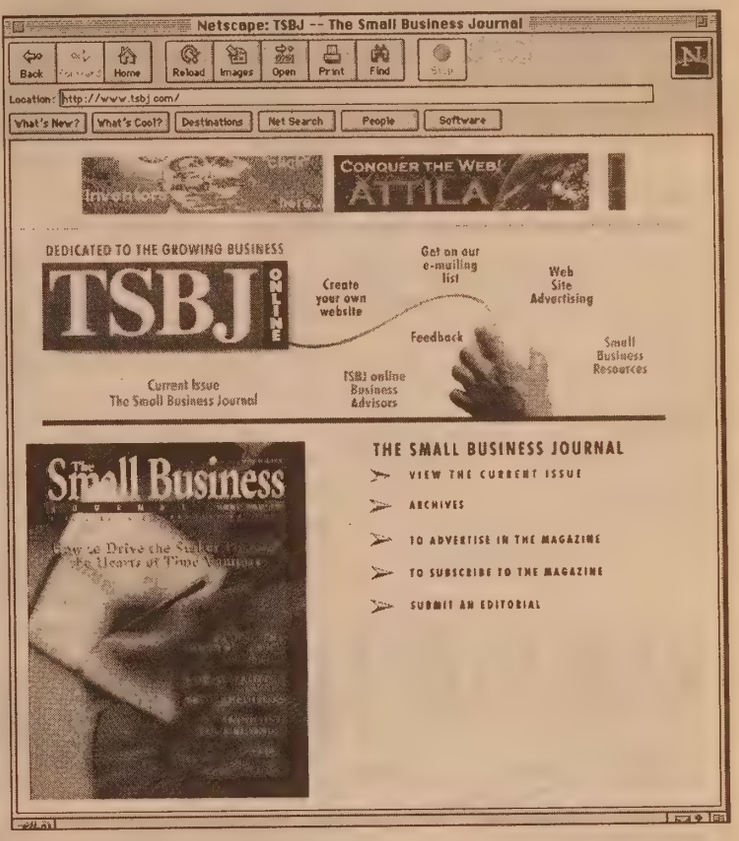
Faxing

Maybe you need to send an occasional fax, but not frequently enough to warrant investing in a fax machine. Or, perhaps you want to send broadcast faxes to your clients—more volume than your little fax machine can handle. Either way, you can use an Internet fax server to send high-quality faxes domestically or abroad. Many fax services offer excellent rates for long-distance faxes, and others are absolutely free (although the free fax services have limited coverage areas).

Other services specialize in sending bulk faxes, and still others can receive faxes for you and deliver the fax to you via electronic mail. For more information about Internet fax services, read the document "How Can I Send a Fax from the Internet?" at *www.northcoast.com/savetz/fax-faq.html*.

Distributing Press Releases

Rather than let your company's latest news go unnoticed, you can use the Internet to get attention. A gaggle of public relations firms have set up shop on the Net. These companies can write press releases and distribute them—online as well as by traditional means.



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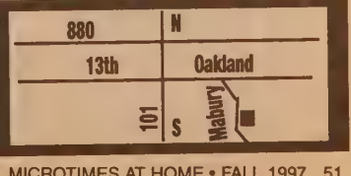

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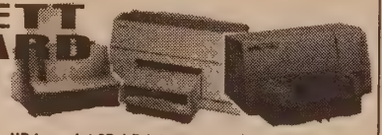

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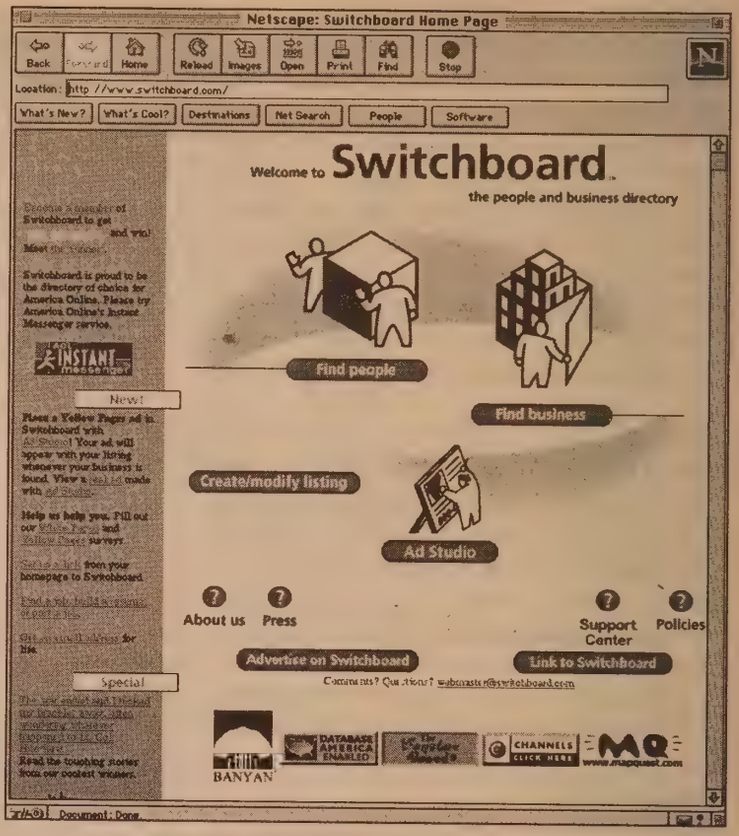
The Switchboard Web site is a searchable "phone book" containing millions of names, phone numbers and addresses from across the US.



Personnel

The Internet's many job placement sites can make any open position get noticed. Online job placement agencies can mean you'll get more qualified applicants from a wider area than a "help wanted" ad in the local newspaper could draw.

For instance, CareerSite (*http://www.careersite.com*) matches workers with prospective jobs that suit them based on occupation, industry, location, education and skills. The service also provides a messaging service applicants can use to contact you.

The Monster Board (*http://beast.monster.com*) offers some 50,000-plus listings, arranged in "communities" of information for entrepreneurs, franchisees, healthcare professionals, CEOs and executives, entry-level jobs and so on.

Classified Ads

If you need to unload an old deep fryer, truck, or that Asteroids game that's been haunting the storage room since time immemorial, chances are good you can find a buyer with the help of Yahoo! Classifieds (*http://classifieds.yahoo.com*) or another of the Net's fine classified advertisement troves.

Conversely, if your business is in need of equipment but you can't afford to buy it new, you can bet that someone, somewhere on the Net has one they're dying to unload.

You may not need Internet access for your business—certainly countless businesses have survived without it. But using the Internet can help you communicate more effectively, solve the little problems that crop up, find more customers and hire great employees. The Internet is a versatile tool, and with some creativity, you can use it to make your business a little bit better, no matter what you do. ■

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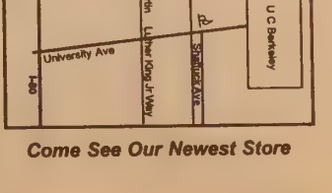

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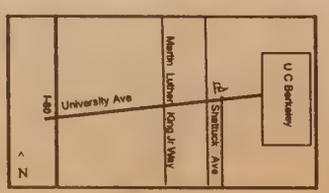

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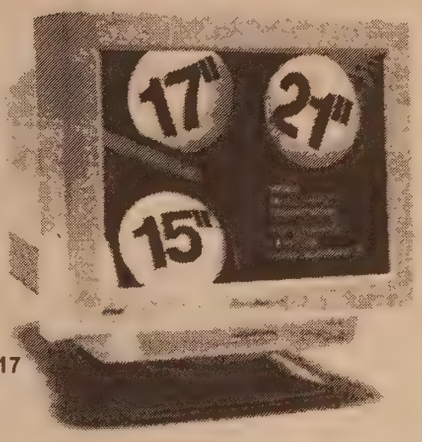

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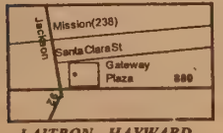

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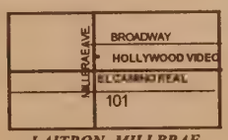

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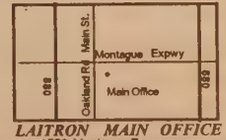

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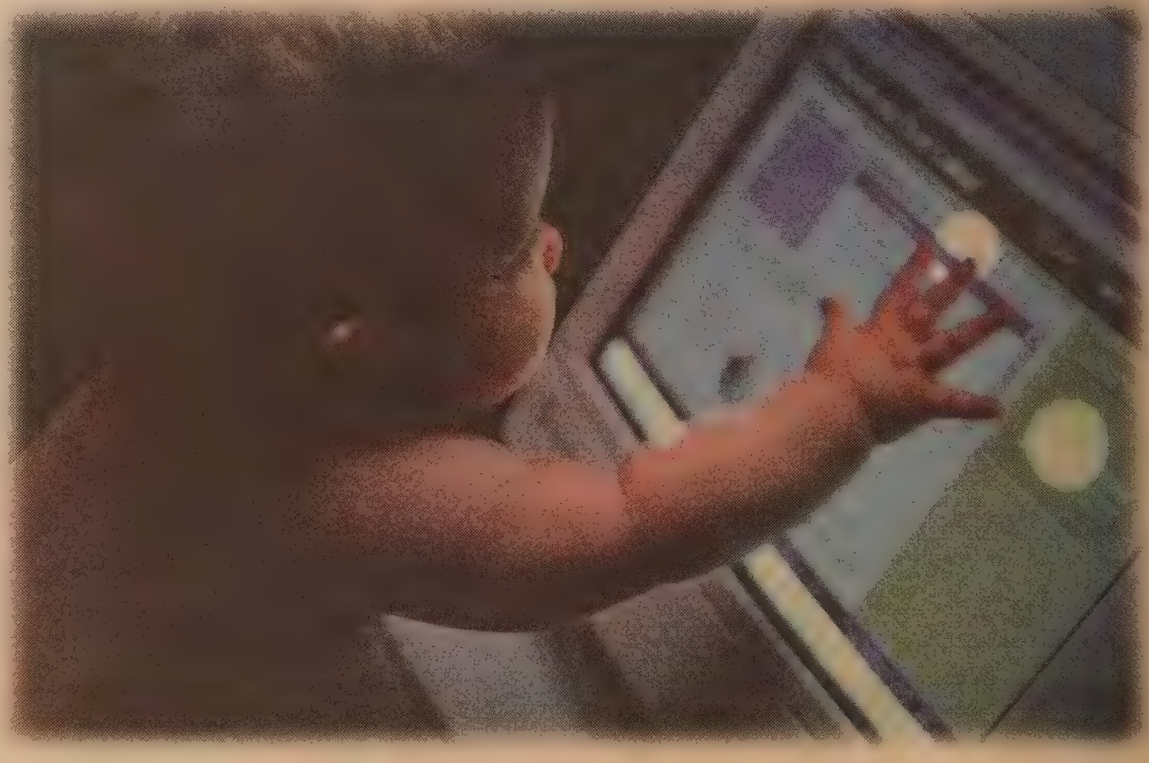
Kids And Computing

Making It Work For Your Family

By Ivars Bezdechi

Particularly if they're not already familiar with computers themselves, parents are often intimidated by the prospect of getting a computer for the kids. Ivars Bezdechi checks with some experts and offers advice to help you get the most benefit from your purchase and keep it from turning into an expensive mistake.



Hardly a day goes by without some gee-whiz media coverage of children involved with some kind of computer-oriented education program. As parents and teachers acquire a compelling interest in the positive or negative influence of the technology on their children and students, questions arise: What exactly is the best way to introduce computing to children? And, will they be truly ready to handle life situations when they pass over the proverbial bridge to the 21st century?

First Steps

Trying to help families get past the bumpy on-ramp to the Information Superhighway is the job of San Francisco-based computer consultant Anne Budnic, who has pursued this specialty for the past six years. She says the best way to introduce computing to children and families is to make it a goal-oriented, collective experience.

Budnic concedes that although most children's educational software involves a lot of point-and-clicking with a mouse or other pointing device, basic typing skills (also referred to as "keyboarding") *will* be necessary, and do need to be mastered. But she points out that learning to type needs to be made into a goal-oriented activity.

"In most instances, handing children software is like handing them candy. But they do see typing as work, and there is no way that you can disguise that to them—it's still work," Budnic says. "For parents who are concerned about their children picking up typing skills and speed, I don't think that is ever going to happen unless it is goal-oriented. The family has to either chart [the child's] progress so that there might be certificates attached to it, or provide some kind of family recognition for achieving those goals."

Even if there is a gaming program the child wants, Budnic explains, it is important that the parent uses it as a reward for achieving a specific typing speed. Budnic cites the case of one of her clients, a Chinese family who had recently immigrated to the US, and whose son wanted to learn how to type. "He was more of an exception to the rule, but he practiced every day; every five word-per-minute increment that he increased, his dad gave him a reward of some kind. I came back three months later and the boy was typing 55 words-per-minute with 100% accuracy." Emulating another family member who uses a computer proficiently can also be a good source of motivation for a prospective computer-literate child.

The very concept of "computerphobia" does not apply to children, says Budnic. She says that while they may not understand the technical aspects of a computer, for a child, particularly a toddler, to use a computer and to have something happen on the screen is as empowering as turning a light bulb on and off or flushing a toilet, Budnic says. "It has that kind of feedback for them where they see it as empowering. The kids are pretty fearless and they don't hold themselves back because they are scared."

Budnic dismisses some educators "who have archaic ideas" and who say that computer education is not necessary and perhaps not appropriate. She thinks that their views have been tainted by what she classifies as the first generation of software "which had all this thrill and kill stuff."

"Educators were really opposed to that, because kids didn't think with it. But the current generation of software is much more open-ended and allows children to be creative in the process. It's not all about shooting aliens down anymore."

Of Babies, Bathwater, And Snake Oil

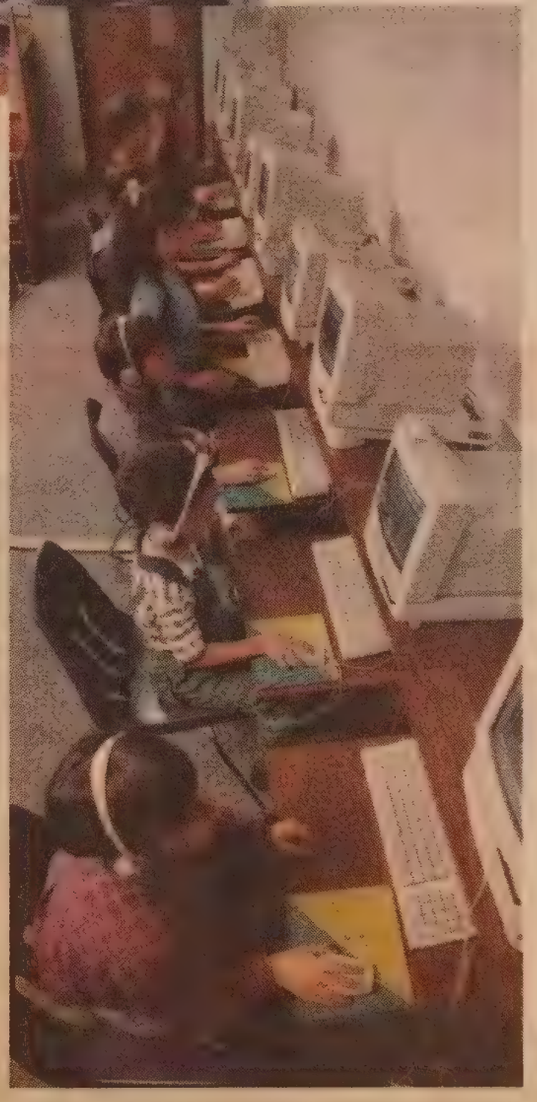
For Clifford Stoll, author of *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts On The Information Highway,* (Anchor Books, 1996), the whole question of kids and computing is not whether it is beneficial or not, but rather that it's an educational concept which must be examined, investigated, and challenged before it is completely embraced and accepted by parents and teachers.

"I'm not saying that technology doesn't have a place in our lives or that we should go back and live in a cave. I'm not saying that the Internet or computers in the classroom is valueless. I'm not saying that the World Wide Web has no future—it's quite the opposite," Stoll says. "I love technology. I love computing, and I've been online for the past twenty-five years. Instead, I feel that it is our responsibility as people who like computing to speak honestly about what computing can and cannot do."

He adds that the current culture is one where children are excited to use computers for instant gratification, but does not offer an opportunity for children to "engage their minds" and discover the world around them. Fundamentally, says Stoll, putting children in front of a computer with a piece of software which is earmarked "educational" does not mean that they are necessarily learning anything. While at first the child may be learning mathematics or participating in an English lesson, more deeply, however, he or she is being unconsciously programmed to accept the computer "as authority."

"We are teaching children to learn from a machine. We are telegraphing that it is more important for you to accept what is being taught to you mechanically, than to question what you see around you," says Stoll. "Your teacher, in essence, is less of an authority than what comes across a modem. You can trust what you can see on the screen—after all, we are putting it there to teach you. What your parents or teacher says probably is not as important as what comes across on the computer screen."

Fundamentally, says Cliff Stoll, putting children in front of a computer with a piece of software which is earmarked "educational" ***does not mean that they are necessarily learning anything.***



Amongst the other things which are being subconsciously taught to children when they are put in front of a computer screen is that it's more important to master computing and Netsurfing than a more creative endeavor requiring some degree of physical adeptness, such as learning a musical instrument.

Apparently, says Stoll, it's widely considered more important to browse the Internet than to read a book or spend time in the library. "How do I know this?" he asks.

continued on page 60

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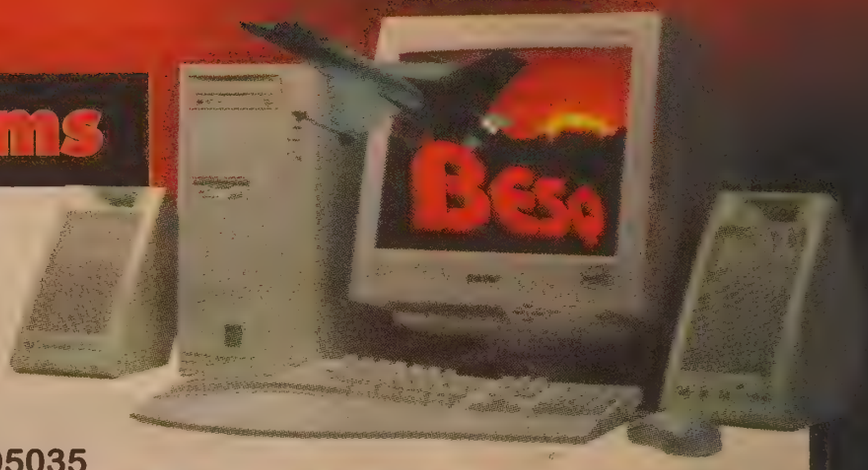

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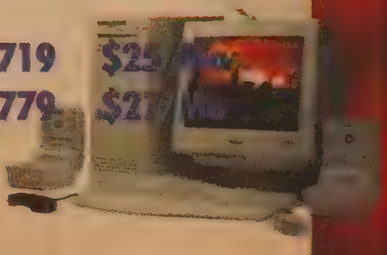

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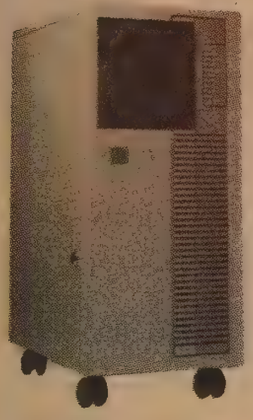

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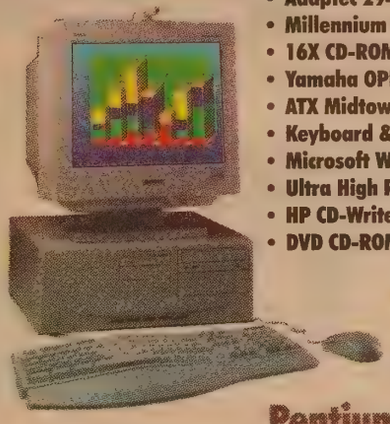

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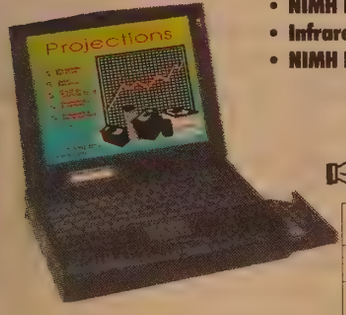

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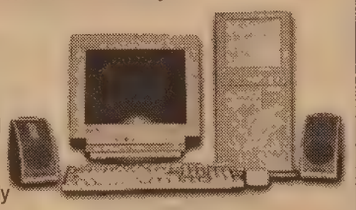

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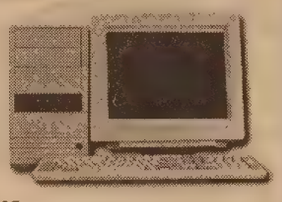

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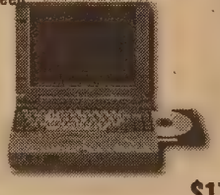

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*(**Kids And Computing** continued from page 57)*

"Every school district in the country has a plan to bring computers into the classroom, and most every school has a computer today. Yet across the country schools are closing their art studios, music studios, libraries and even gymnasiums are being changed into computer labs. Whatever happened to shop class? Today, when you go into your local high school you'll find that the shop has been converted into a computer lab. Nobody will ever need to know anything about auto mechanics, carpentry or plumbing, sewing or learn how to cook? My question is, who exactly is making these kinds of decisions under whose auspices?"

Consultant Anne Budnic: "Kids' programs demand computing power. Animation, graphics and sounds all need lots of fire power. You can do word processing with a 486-based computer, but if you give it to a child, it is going to be an absolute dog."

According to Stoll, who is an occasional commentator on computing for *The Site*, a computer show shown on the MSNBC cable network, the response he has received about his book and views has been varied. "Surprisingly the people who have read it and recommended it most highly have been schoolteachers and librarians—people for whom I had not written the book." He says that the computing industry and society as a whole have a responsibility to not overpromote the World Wide Web with grandiose talk about how it will revolutionize society. Rather, with this technology, there is a responsibility to talk about the good things and the detrimental things which grow out of what he called "our love affair" with the Internet and computing as a whole.

Shopping Tips

After considering whether you want your children to be exposed to computing in a concerted effort, you will need software and hardware.

According to Budnic, this has been the first year where educational software has shown the least amount of male gender bias, and "where software for girls is actually intelligent and is geared towards their interest—and gone beyond being some shoot 'em up game which have been traditionally developed by and for boys." Using a computer is of universal interest to children, she says, adding that once a child has begun to use a computer, he or she should be encouraged to keep up their newly-learned skills.

Still, Budnic encourages her parent clients to talk with other parents about software choices. Magazines such as *Family PC* or *Home PC Magazine* allow parents to get a sense of the best hardware and software and the best prices available in the marketplace.

"The clients I often work with consider themselves to be the laggards of computer technology, and are often unaware or afraid of the terminology used in the industry. They are terrified that they might be oversold or even undersold or be sold the wrong thing," Budnic says. She generally recommends that if their friends are using one type of computer, such as a PC or Macintosh, they get the same for their family

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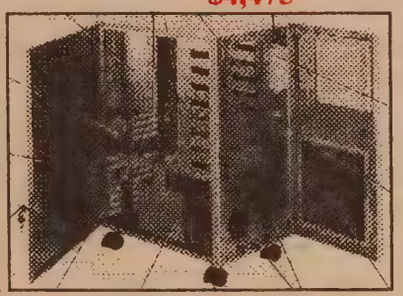

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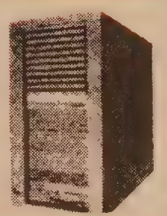

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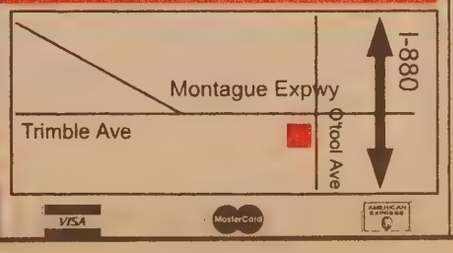

so they can share information with each other if and when they encounter a problem.

Budnic tends to downplay the value of software which comes already pre-loaded on a computer's hard disk. "Those computers are trying to be all things to all people, but there might be a program for a toddler, or another for an eight-year-old, and a program for a high schooler, it's rarely the right mix especially for the families who are buying their first computer."

From a hardware standpoint, Budnic advises parents to avoid giving children a hand-me-down type of computer which they may have been using for themselves. "It should be the other way around; the kids should be handing their old computers down to their parents because kids' programs demand computing power. Animation, graphics and sounds all need lots of fire power. You can get away doing word processing with a 486-based computer, but if you give it to a child, it is going to be an absolute dog."

Parents' Resources On The Web

Ironically, the best and most up-to-date resources for parents for children's computing are on the World Wide Web. Budnic herself maintains a web site called "PEP" (Parents-Educators-Publishers) at *http://www.pepsite.com* which she has developed to address the interests and needs of these three audiences as it pertains to children and computing. The site also includes children's software reviews, names and addresses of educational software publishers, as well as Budnic's own contributions to the "On Computers" radio show heard throughout California.

Other web sites worth considering:

***Newsweek* Magazine's Parent's Software Guide** *http://www.newsweekparentsguide.com* —This Web site provides the most comprehensive, in-depth and easy-to-use guide available to children's software on the web. Software publishers are asked to nominate their best titles—up to eight per year—in six categories. Newsweek staffers rate each disc using a standard set of criteria, and send the best to committees of parents, kids and teachers for additional review. All titles receive "Report Cards;" the most notable get their in-depth "Parent's Guide reviews;" and the best of those are designated as "Editors' Choice" selections.

The Web site also features a "Parent's Guide" featuring frequently updated software reviews, and the ability to browse the site's archives, or a search for specific software to match specific educational goals. One can also read the latest from their expert contributing editors in "Views and News," and trade thoughts with them and with other parents via "Your Say," the site's bulletin board.

FamilySurf *http://www.familysurf.com* Maintained by Steve and Ruth Bennett, FamilySurf provides parents with annotated lists of sites appropriate for children, software reviews, advice for computing with kids, and includes a children's Internet activity center.

Superkids *http://www.superkids.com* Features unbiased reviews of children's software by parents, teachers, and kids.

Lycos *http://www.lycos.com/kids/* A launch pad for more children computing sites on the World Wide Web. ■

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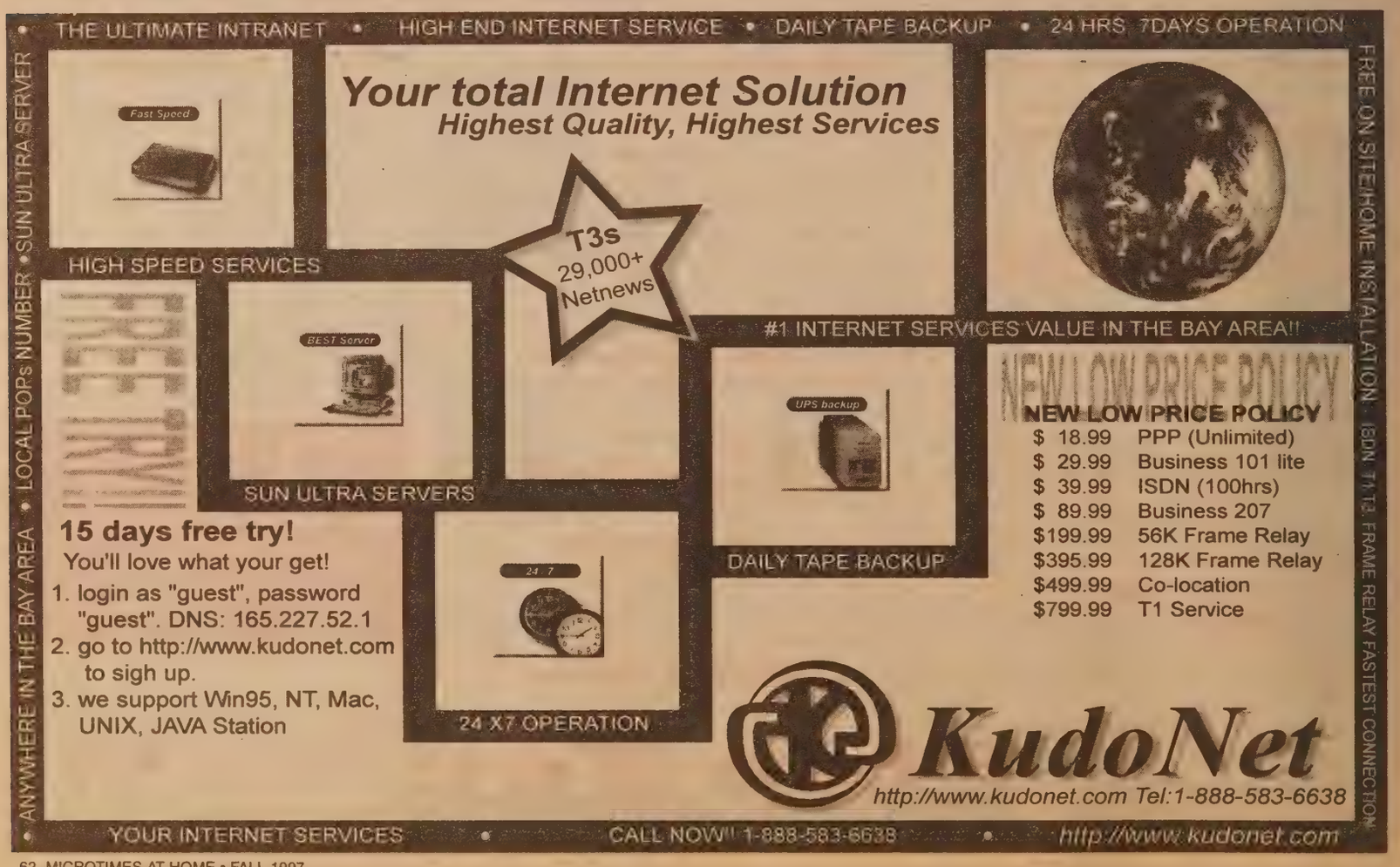
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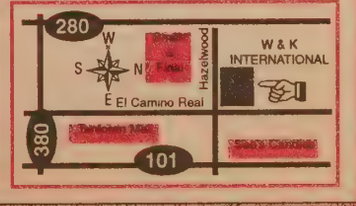

What About Us Girls?

Another Side Of Computer Games

By Gen Katz

Traditionally, computer games have been the province of boys (of all ages), featuring shoot-'em-ups, hack 'n' slash, and a hefty complement of noise and action. More recently, the cross-gender appeal of offerings like *Myst* has caused game developers to consider and cater to the preferences of female players. Gen Katz takes a look at some of the more interesting options.

This article looks at games for girls. Some games are designed specifically for girls—the kind boys would ostentatiously barf at. Some feature girls as the prime movers; some are constructed so girls and boys have the freedom to play it their way. Some are just fun to play, with good story lines, great characters—and no blood.

Pretty In Pink

Barbie Fashion Designer

Ages 6 and up

If mothers aren't afraid that an excess of pink will doom their daughters to lives of mall shopping, the Barbie products have a lot to offer. For many girls, the world of Barbie is a comfortable, familiar play world, and Mattel is very successful in knowing how to please its young customers.

The first part of *Barbie Fashion Designer* is a pretty standard paper-doll-type experience. Various pieces of clothing—skirts, blouses, jackets—are put together, fabric selected (unfortunately from only twelve patterns) and color applied.

What follows moves paper dolls into the 21st century. The outfit appears on a 3-D Barbie, who then struts down a runway in traditional model walk wearing this outfit, and then, with a press of a button, the pattern is printed out in color or black and white depending on your printer. Using the special fabric-backed paper, the pattern can then be cut out and assembled with ingeniously flexible tape and tiny-tiny Velcro snaps. Voila! Barbie has a new outfit.

Mattel has done its homework well. This could spawn an endless variety of pattern-making products—cars, planes, furniture, buildings. (*Barbie Fashion Designer*, $44.99, Mattel, Windows 3.1 and Windows 95. Mac version available Fall '97)

Barbie Magic Fairy Tales

Ages 4 and up

In this year's release, *Barbie Magic Fairy Tales*, Mattel tries for a more assertive role model than the Rapunzel of the long golden hair. In this version of *Rapunzel*, it is Barbie who saves the prince by cutting off her long hair and using it to escape the tower.

The game includes simple puzzles, memory matching and ordering puzzle games, a fairy godmother, and lots of roses. The learning activities are designed using things that appeal to girls—dresses, jewels, flowers, even a wedding cake. The wedding cake was fun.

Control buttons like forward, back, quit and help are represented as leaves, roses, suns, and gates. While this is cute, having a more standard interface might provide a child with some carry-over skills to other computer activities. (*Barbie Magic Fairy Tales*, $29.99, Mattel, Mac/Win hybrid disk)

Vampire Diaries

Ages 10 and up

Her Interactive's new title *The Vampire Diaries* is meant to entertain.

Its main character is Elena, a 16-year-old high school girl who has just returned from Europe and attends a party with her little sister. The sister is found mysteriously bitten, and Elena must find out what is going on.

Live actors engage Elena in conversations to further the plot. Responses depend on what has occurred before, so if the sequence is different, the responses are different. The use of live actors and voice conversation appeals to girls' often-stated desire for communication. This game is densely populated with people who talk with you—some you like and some you don't.

The original story is taken from a popular book by Lisa J. Smith. Her Interactive maintains an active Web site that previews scenes from their games along with other topics for girls—news, books, links to other sites.

continued on page 68

Some of the new breed of computer games are designed specifically for girls, some feature a female lead character, and others focus more on what women have desired most in computer games: interesting dialogue (as opposed to violence) and lush graphics. In *Let's Talk About Me* from Simon & Schuster Interactive (opposite page, left), it's a pastel, no-boys-allowed universe with hairstyling, horoscopes, clothing and dream-interpretation as the topics of choice; In *Smarty* from Tom Nicholson Associates (opposite page, right), the lead character, Mimi Smarty Pants, is a nine-year-old whiz-girl with a penchant for mischief and exploring the adult world around her; And in the more gender-neutral *Titanic—Adventure Out Of Time* from Cyberflix (this page), players engage in lengthy dialogue with characters such as Georgia (top), in the search for clues and explore the meticulously rendered interior of the ill-fated ship, including the famous grand staircase (bottom).

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Left to right: Rockett ponders the challenges of teenage life in the girl's room in ***Rockett's New School*** from Purple Moon; drawing pictures in ***Orley's Draw-A-Story*** (Brøderbund) helps lead character Orley tell stories, and it's your job to solve the mystery in Brøderbund's ***The Last Express.***

(What About Us Girls? continued from page 64)

(*The Vampire Diaries*, $39.95, Her Interactive, Windows 95, 1-800-561-0908)

Let's Talk About Me

Ages 8 to 14

Let's Talk About Me, by Simon & Schuster Interactive and Girl Games, feels more like a front end to the Internet or an activity beyond the computer screen then simply an interactive game. The colors and artwork are funky, the voices amusing and the music cool and thankfully relatively non-repetitive. Some parts are better than others but most will please their target audience.

The program is filled with clothing, hairdos, puzzles and advice based upon personality quizzes, dreams and color preferences. Some will scoff at horoscopes, palmistry, dream interpretation and fortune telling as aids to foretelling one's future— but hey, I can remember the Ouija board, and who doesn't know her astrological sign?

There is a section on mentors, where real women on video answer a variety of questions selected from the screen. While not all of the mentors appear on video, those that do create an extremely compelling one-to-one effect. Girls can correspond with the mentors via email, and there is an online AOL access kit included in the CD-ROM.

The program skirts around some real information on subjects that girls are concerned with; many responses to the questions are trivial and read more like fortune cookie advice. The section exploring "Misery" exhorts you to tell the truth and delivers "advice" such as "You are in utter misery ... Buck up" or "Things will get either much worse or better very soon." While none of the advice is harmful, teenagers who are looking for serious answers will have to find them elsewhere.

Meanwhile, perhaps some of the questions raised will prompt girls to meaningful self exploration. A sequel *Let's Talk About Me—Deluxe*, is already in the works and will be produced by Davidson. (*Let's Talk About Me*, $29.95, Simon & Schuster/Girl Games, Mac/Win hybrid disk)

Rockett's New School and Secret Paths in the Forest

Ages 7 to 12

After four years of study at Interval Research as to what girls like, Interval's spinoff Purple Moon has two games, *Rockett's New School* and *Secret Paths in the Forest*, ready to arrive on the shelves in September.

The stories are populated by a host of well-developed and widely mixed characters. Rockett is trying to negotiate the challenges of a new school, new friends and the usual assortment of teenage relationships. The characters return in *Secret Paths in the Forest*, which features a tree house like a chat room where the girls try to understand and help each other.

There will be free merchandise in every box, such as bendable characters from the story and magic healing gems. The founders' credentials are impressive enough to warrant checking these out when they arrive. (*Rockett's New School, Secret Paths in the Forest*, $29.95 each, Purple Moon, Mac and Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, release date September '97)

The Female Lead

A whole series of games doesn't overtly cultivate the female audience, but features a girl as the main character. (Some self-described "gender-neutral" games have characters of both sexes, but the lead character is male.) In the following games, the heroine appears as a spunky, adventurous character who reinforces girl's leadership roles.

Madeline's European Adventure

Ages 5 and up

Creative Wonders has repeated its success with a second Madeline game—*European Adventures*. The character is taken from the book by Ludwig Bemelmans, but the story is completely original.

In a mission to save the genie of the lamp, Madeline must travel through France, Switzerland, Italy and Turkey. Along the way, Madeline picks up the sounds and words of the various countries and gets a painless lesson in geography.

Deborah Cook, the producer, is sensitive to the sound quality in her games—a sensitivity all too often lacking in a number of kids' games. You only have to hear one game with a repetitive musical phrase and a grating or saccharine voice to really appreciate the voices and music in this one. (*Madeline's European Adventure*, $34.95, Creative Wonders/Electronic Arts, Windows 3.1 and Windows 95)

Smarty

Ages 5 to 10

If you remember *Chop Suey*, you will be delighted to find that Theresa Duncan has produced another title, *Smarty*.

Smarty features a nine-year-old mischievous whiz kid called Mimi Smarty Pants. Theresa understands a child's fascination with observing the often inexplicable, glamorous, and mysterious behavior of adults.

Smarty is given ample opportunity to interact with the eccentric adult characters when she summers at Aunt Olive's. There's Percy, who runs a pirate radio station and keeps his Christmas decorations on all year; there's the cashier at the Dollar Dream Store, who does spells and horoscopes, and wears purple nail polish while learning to become a librarian.

Aunt Olive's house is filled with things to do, and clicking on things can land you anywhere from a pirate's den at the bottom of the fish tank (where you can listen to the Oyster Orchestra), to a bubble bath, or to an assortment of kitchen weirdness. Outside there is a garden with a Hollywood-producer bug drinking martinis, and a telescope in the back yard for spying on the neighbors.

We all could use an Aunt Olive. (*Smarty*, $34.95, Tom Nicholson Associates, Mac, Windows 95 and Windows NT.)

Orley's Draw-A-Story

Ages 5 to 10

Brøderbund's character in *Orley's Draw-A-Story* is a young Jamaican girl who speaks with a musical

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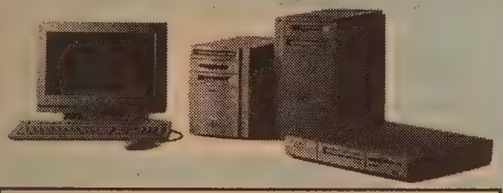

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island patois. She leads you through the story, introduces you to Jamaican culture, and encourages you to paint. Players help Orley tell story adventures by drawing pictures. Children will be amazed when their pictures magically come to life and animate the story. (*Orley's Draw A Story*, $29.95, Brøderbund, Mac/Win hybrid disk)

Beyond the Limit—Ultimate Climb

Ages 9 and up

This game will have players straining to pick the right handholds on a rock face to make it to the top in this engaging rock climbing experience. Novices will learn how to recognize good footholds, when to use clips, and how to interpret the body language of your climber for clues as to unsafe holds. Interspersed with climbing are adventures involving mine shafts, wild beasts and strange characters.

You start the game by choosing the character who will represent you from a choice of two men and two women, all with varying degrees of experience, strength and knowledge. I enjoyed Jett, a fast-talking New York City woman with an attitude and swagger. The humor in having one character who has learned climbing by reading up on it and whose name is Billy will not be missed by any adult playing this Microsoft game. The characters look, climb, walk and talk like real people with their own individual characteristics.

To successfully complete the game you have to choose your equipment wisely, pick up information along the way, select the right team and learn a little about rock climbing. (*Beyond the Limit—Ultimate Climb*, $34.95, Microsoft, Windows 95, NT.)

Gender Neutrality

SimPark

Ages 8 and up

Some games are as gender neutral as a camera. The Sim series of games by Maxis has always had a reasonable complement of girl players, although boys and girls seem to play the games differently.

In *SimPark*, learning insidiously seeps in from the time you first select the location for your park, populate it with plants and animals and try to maintain a balanced ecosystem.

To keep you on your toes, there are email messages from a bossy supervisor and hints from Rizzo, the too-helpful frog. This game develops environmental awareness without preaching: You can cause disasters, watch species become extinct (or so populous as to overrun other species), or make changes to the climate to see how it affects the animals and plants in your park.

This kind of "what would happen if" scenario encourages a self-directed exploration, which results in the best kind of learning experience. This is family fun, and the adults can sneak back, turn off Rizzo, and learn to recognize bird calls, bone up on their tree identification skills—or cause a few disasters themselves. (*Sim Park*, Maxis, $39.99, Windows 95)

***SimPark*'s "what would happen if" scenario encourages a self-directed exploration, which results in the best kind of learning experience.**

Top Secret Decoder

Ages 7 and up

Everyone likes playing with secret codes and messages. Herisson Fox in conjunction with Houghton Mifflin Interactive have created *Top Secret Decoder*—a code maker and code breaker in an attaché case.

The opening screens and sounds—a clever cross between James Bond and *Mission Impossible*—sets the mood for the activity. Type a message in the top screen, select a code, and the encoded message appears in the bottom screen.

There are twenty-two individual codes, some with names you may remember from your childhood—Mirror, Reverse Pig Latin, Cipher Offset. Plus, there are inventive geometric folded codes done by Scott Kim, codes in shapes like hearts, and codes which require a comb to read.

Messages can be printed out and faxed to co-conspirators. Voiced help is available to explain all the codes. It's an activity that kids will return to time after time. Adults might try using the program to send coded faxes when standard communication fails to get attention. (*Top Secret Decoder*, $39.95, Houghton Mifflin, Mac/Win hybrid disk)

No Assault Weapons

Well, perhaps a revolver or two, but that's it.

Here are games that conform pretty much to what women have said they want in their games—an engrossing story line, engaging characters, attractive settings to wander through, and no bloodshed. It's not surprising that a number of boys/men find these types of games satisfying to play as well.

The Last Express

Ages 13 and up

The Last Express is a brand new game, designed by Jordan Mechner for Brøderbund, aimed at the teenage market. The game uses 3-D rendering and rotoscoped animation instead of video, which gives it a hand-drawn, storybook feeling.

There is a mystery to be solved, dangers to be avoided, treasure to be found and a romance to encounter. Clues are picked up by interacting with the characters, and because the game is essentially being scripted as you play it, it is never the same twice.

The action takes place on the Orient Express just before the first World War. The train is accurately and lovingly detailed, and playing in this elegant deco interior adds to the pleasure of the game. While the main protagonist is Robert Cath, two strong female characters, Anna and Tatiana, are involved in the action. (*The Last Express*, $40, Brøderbund, Mac, Windows 95, DOS)

Titanic—Adventure Out Of Time

Ages 13 and up

No, you won't be able to prevent the ship from going down—but you do have the opportunity of changing the course of history.

This is another example of a game played in a wonderful environment. Because game developers noticed that women played *Myst* differently then their male companions (they enjoyed exploring the space), we may be in for a whole spate of exquisitely rendered, sumptuous environments for games.

The opportunity to experience the lush excessiveness of the accurately rendered Titanic is a game in itself. The format for the game is similar to *The Last Express*—You are a spy, and in the course of recovering certain important items you meet a wide variety of fellow passengers who engage you in conversation and drop you clues.

The game moves at a leisurely pace until the ship hits the iceberg. At that time you have two and a half hours (the actual time it took the Titanic to sink) to finish up the game before the ship sinks. The disk is filled with interesting information about the ship: who was saved and who drowned, as well as news clips and photos from that period. I was surprised at the haunting sense of loss I felt when the ship finally went down.

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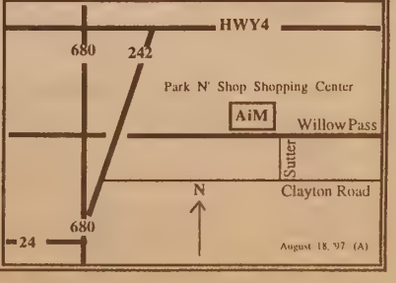

(*www.cyberflix.com*) where you can add additional tour guides, tips and information. It doesn't sell tickets to the musical, but it's almost the next best thing. (*Titanic—Adventure Out of Time*, $49.95, Cyberflix, Mac, Windows 95, NT)

Magic the Gathering

Ages Kids to Adults

How would you classify a game that has beautiful graphics, strong female characters, spell casting, fantasy, magic, no blood violence—and it can be played at your own pace?

While *Magic the Gathering* has been thought of as primarily a boys' game, it contains many of the elements that women and girls would like to see in games.

Magic the Gathering is a strategy game with the mission to vanquish evil from the land of Shandalar. This is accomplished through dueling contests of magical skills, using spells and creatures to wear your opponent's energy down to zero—at which point you win.

Much of the activity in both the card game and the computer game involves amassing duel-winning decks.

The computer game player will have a number of technical devices to help her with this task, such as a Deck Builder utility program for designing and building decks, and The Duel, another utility program where the deck's efficacy can be tested. Filters are available to sort cards by color, creatures, spells and land types; decks can be saved for future use.

There are 400 cards to start with (the actual trading cards number in the thousands) and Microprose is planning expansion sets. Multiplayer support is planned for the future; until then you are playing against the machine. Beginners are given a break—the machine's AI has been programmed to make stupid moves at the novice level.

Magic the Gathering is for not for those who want the instant gratification of load, click or shoot. This strategy game has a steep learning curve; it would probably be helpful to have a *Magic* aficionado by your side. The live video tutorial is beautifully done, but a simpler step-through of the screens would have been more helpful. (*Magic the Gathering*, $55–$65, Microprose, Windows 95)

Obsidian

Ages Kids to Adults

Obsidian, the game that has been favorably compared to *Myst*, is too much of a good thing.

There are three major dream realms to explore—The Bureau, The Spider, and Bismuth. I got my money's worth after the Bureau Realm—and was ready for the end game.

The graphics for the Bureau Realm convey an endless world of rooms, libraries, plazas. The lighting gives the entire space a luminous quality, and the clever concept of turning this space on each of its six sides works well. The effect is a dizzying six dimensional space.

The puzzles are done by Scott Kim and have his graphical signature. This world is populated by Vidbots—mechanized video screens offering you amusing platitudes and sometimes—but not always—helpful hints. The challenge in this realm to get past the bureaucracy which is doing all it can to thwart you—a clever construct for an adversary.

There are still two more realms to explore before the finale, and I must admit that I turned to the strategy guide. If games are going to become this obtuse, we mere mortals will need some help in finding our way through to enjoy them. ■

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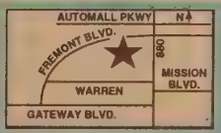
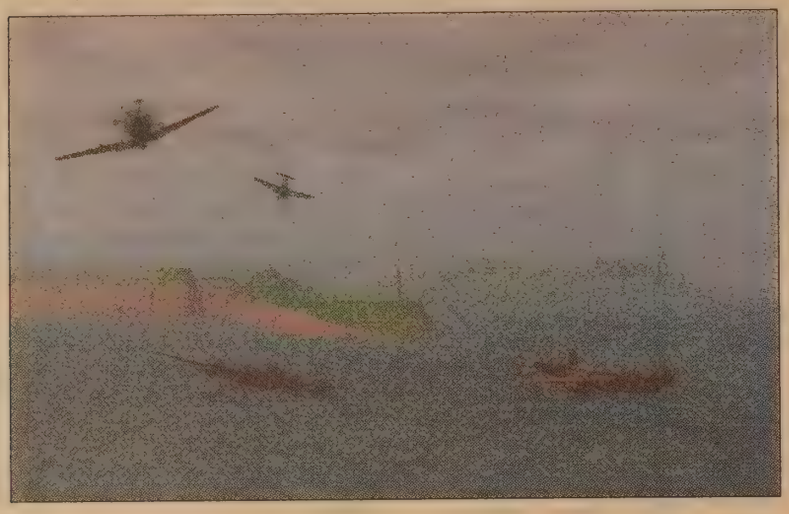




Fun And Learning

Best Products For Family Computing

By Jim Pedicord

Among the thousands of entertainment offerings for the home computer market, many offer high value and others fail to live up to their promise. Jim Pedicord looks at some best bets in the current crop.

With computers now well-entrenched in the home, the PC has become a major console for entertainment and education. Old board games now grace home monitors, high-tech jet fighters roar across the screen, and it's clear that computer games and entertainment are reaching new highs in standards and sophistication.

Classics Digitized

Many old favorite board games are now converted to home computer play.

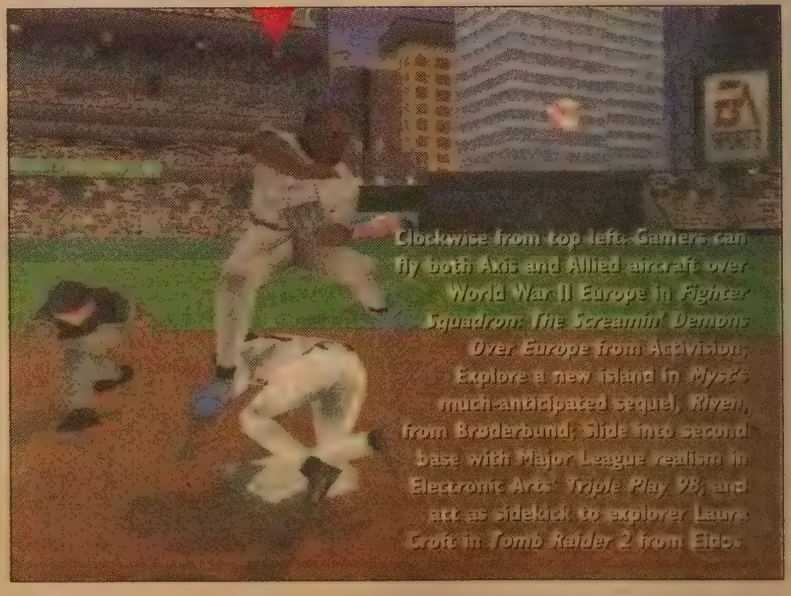
Hasbro Interactive has computerized many such games, with versions of *Risk*, *Scrabble* and *Battleship* all playable on the PC and *Pictionary* soon to follow. Players can match wits with the computer or contend with human players over a network, modem or the Internet. All the old aspects of the original games are included and in many cases new features and options have been added. In *Risk*, for example, several new maps and optional rules add much more strategy to the game.

Other games of yesteryear have also made the transition to the electronic age. Sierra On-line has expanded its 3D Ultra line of pinball games with *Creep Night* and the upcoming *Lost Continent*, both complete with animated artwork and spectacular sound effects that take pinball to a new dimension. GT Interactive will soon be releasing a more classic pinball simulation, *Balls of Steel*, with five tables to test your reflexes.

In a rather different vein Sierra has also created *3D Ultra Miniature Golf*, a mouse-operated simulator complete with windmills, bank shots and an angry, golf-ball-eating Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Kid Stuff

With the rapid growth of computers in households with kids, the quantity and quality of educational and entertainment software for children has increased dramatically as well.



Clockwise from top left: Gamers can fly both Axis and Allied aircraft over World War II Europe in *Fighter Squadron: The Screamin' Demons Over Europe* from Activision; Explore a new island in *Myst*'s much-anticipated sequel, *Riven*, from Broderbund; Slide into second base with Major League realism in Electronic Arts' *Triple Play 98*; and act as sidekick to explorer Laura Croft in *Tomb Raider 2* from Eidos.

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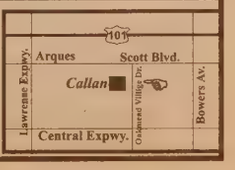

Below left to right: Two new titles from Activision: 3-D role-playing in the lush graphical environment of *Hexen 2*, and using strategy to defeat your opponent in the futuristic battle game *Dark Reign*.

Titles range from simple activities for toddlers to primers on algebra and geometry for older children. Most are presented in an entertaining fashion, with great graphics and sounds to keep the child interested in learning.

Davidson's *Blaster* line is one of the top-selling educational series. The ever-popular *Math Blaster* is being expanded with the new *Math Blaster 2* that builds on the original, adding more complex numeric problems and more adventure fun. *Math Blaster Mystery* and *Reader Blaster Mystery* are two new titles to appear later this year covering a higher level of reading and mathematical education.

Knowledge Adventure has come out with a line of titles based on the grade levels, called the Jump Start line. Each of these titles has a wide assortment of subjects found in a specific scholastic grade ranging from toddlers to 4th grade. *Jump Start 3rd Grade*, the latest title, gives language, math, science, history and music in a fun and entertaining adventure. Coming in the near future will be *Jump Start 5th Grade*, *Jump Start Typing* and *Jump Start 1st Grade Math*.

Sanctuary Woods has two lineups of educational games, the Head Coach series, which incorporates reading and math into fun titles based around sports, and the Franklin Activity Center for younger children, which provides a variety of fun puzzles. The Head Coach series educates by using examples in sports and, in the case of *Major League Math*, teaches mathematics by figuring out numbers and scores in a baseball environment.

In the entertainment line for children, Humongous Entertainment has long been the leader in fun animated adventures for younger children. With such memorable characters as Putt Putt, Freddi Fish and Pajama Sam already to their credit, Humongous has several new games due shortly. *Putt Putt Travels Through Time* is the latest in the Putt Putt series; it catapults children through various eras of history, with simple puzzles and plenty of surprises. *Spy Fox in Dry Cereal* is an animated detective adventure with a new set of characters aimed at an older age bracket and will be available this fall.

With computers now an integral part of the home, entertainment software will continue to flourish in the years to come. Instead of video games, park your children in front of the computer with an educational adventure to occupy their time.

For older children, Houghton Mifflin Interactive has come out with an interesting science/historical series where the child can travel back through time to meet inventors of some of the worlds greatest discoveries. The latest title *InventorLabs: Transportation* covers the invention of the car, locomotive and airplane with diagrams, notes and fun activities like designing your own car or plane. Later on in the year, *The Day the World Broke* graphic adventure game for children is set to be released. The players must search various locales to find out how the earth really works in this fairy tale adventure.

Teens And Adults

Though games like *Quake*, *Doom* and *Myst* have long been the catch phrases when computer gaming is mentioned, there are many other games catering to almost every personality. With a wide range of adventure, action, sports and strategy titles available, there's something for almost everyone.

Mystery/adventure is a popular theme found in many current and upcoming games. *The Last Express*, a mystery from Brøderbund, is an art-nouveau, animated adventure game taking place on a train traveling through early 20th century Europe. *Shivers 2* from Sierra is a more supernatural thriller with a wide variety of puzzles to test your wit. Another more sinister title is *Realms of Haunting*, an action/adventure thriller from Interplay; it takes place in the haunts of an old mansion with an engrossing apocalyptic storyline.

Coming this fall is the highly anticipated sequel to the largest-selling computer game of all time, *Myst*. *Riven*, by Brøderbund subsidiary Red Orb, will take place on another island in the world of Myst. With fantastic artwork, a wide variety of puzzles, interaction with actual characters, and the mysterious atmosphere that made *Myst* so popular, this is sure to be the hit of the holiday season.

Adventuring in a different vein is available from Legacy Software in *D.A. Pursuit of Justice*, a multimedia adventure where you are the

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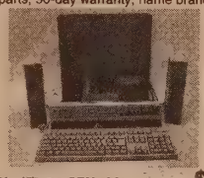

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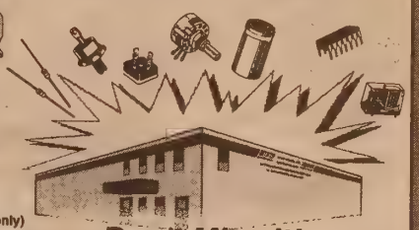

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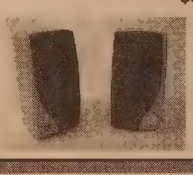

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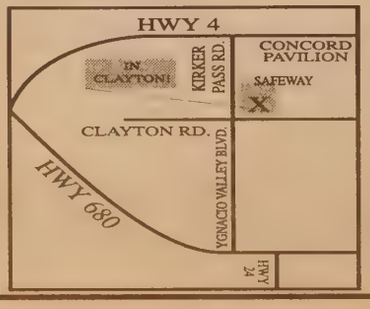

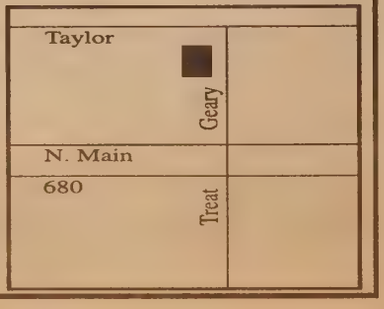

District Attorney and must put together a complete trial case. With three cases to solve you must interrogate witnesses, accumulate evidence and then present the case before a judge and jury. A great game for the trial lawyer in all of us!

Action games are still a huge favorite—and with the endless parade from almost every manufacturer, some prudence may need to be applied when buying. For those looking for more excitement with *Quake*, Activision have released two additional mission packs for the game: *Scourge of Armagon* and *Dissolution of Eternity*. Both of these add-ons sport new maps, weapons and traps. Another title appearing soon from Activision and based on the Quake engine will be *Hexen 2*, an action game that adds some role-playing elements. Gorgeous graphics in four different "worlds" and multiple characters should make this title stand out from the rest.

A unique twist in the action genre is *Interstate '76* from Activision—instead of strapping guns on your back you strap them on your '72 Piranha automobile and proceed to take on the bad guys on the desert highways. From GT Interactive comes *Shadow Warriors*, a *Duke Nukem*-style romp through the streets of Japan in guise of a ninja with appropriate weapons and wisecracks.

With the huge success of such games as *Command & Conquer* and *Warcraft 2* it is not surprising that real-time strategies are a very hot commodity. *Galactic Imperium* from GT Interactive is a recent release of intergalactic diplomacy, research and combat set in the far reaches of space. *Blizzard* is a follow-up to *Warcraft 2; Starcraft* a real-time battle in space. Players control one of three races and must build forces and acquire materials to be able to conquer the opposing forces. *Dark Reign* from Activison is another futuristic strategy game where militaristic units face off against one other in various battles against the computer or your favorite opponent over the Internet.

For something completely different, Mindscape has come out with *Creatures*, an artificial life simulator where you breed, raise and protect small beings called Norns. Similar to the Tamagotchi virtual pets that have swept the nation, this game adds many more features than its hand-held electronic counterpart, all displayed in wonderful graphics on your computer screen. Finally Laura Croft, the now famous heroine of Eidos' *Tomb Raider* (considered by many people to be last year's game of the year) will be back in a brand new adventure called (originally enough) *Tomb Raider 2*. This time there will be many more locales for Croft to explore, including a European city, the outdoors and underwater environments. With fantastic graphics, this fun action/adventure game is sure to be a hit this holiday season.

Sports

Sports games have moved from the arcades and console units to hard drives and CDs. With full-motion video, 24-bit color and commentary by today's biggest announcers, these games practically put you into the sporting venue.

With the aid of a computer and one of the latest in a long line of golf simulators, you can traverse the links at Pebble Beach with the click of a mouse button. Electronic Arts has just released *PGA Golf Pro*, enabling computer golfers to practice their trade against the machine or up to eighty other players over Internet.

If trying to hit that little white ball drives you crazy, try your hand at designing a course with *Jack Nicklaus 4* from Accolade. After you create the course, you can pull out your cyber clubs and take to the links, or give the course to a friend and let him try his luck.

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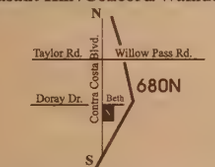

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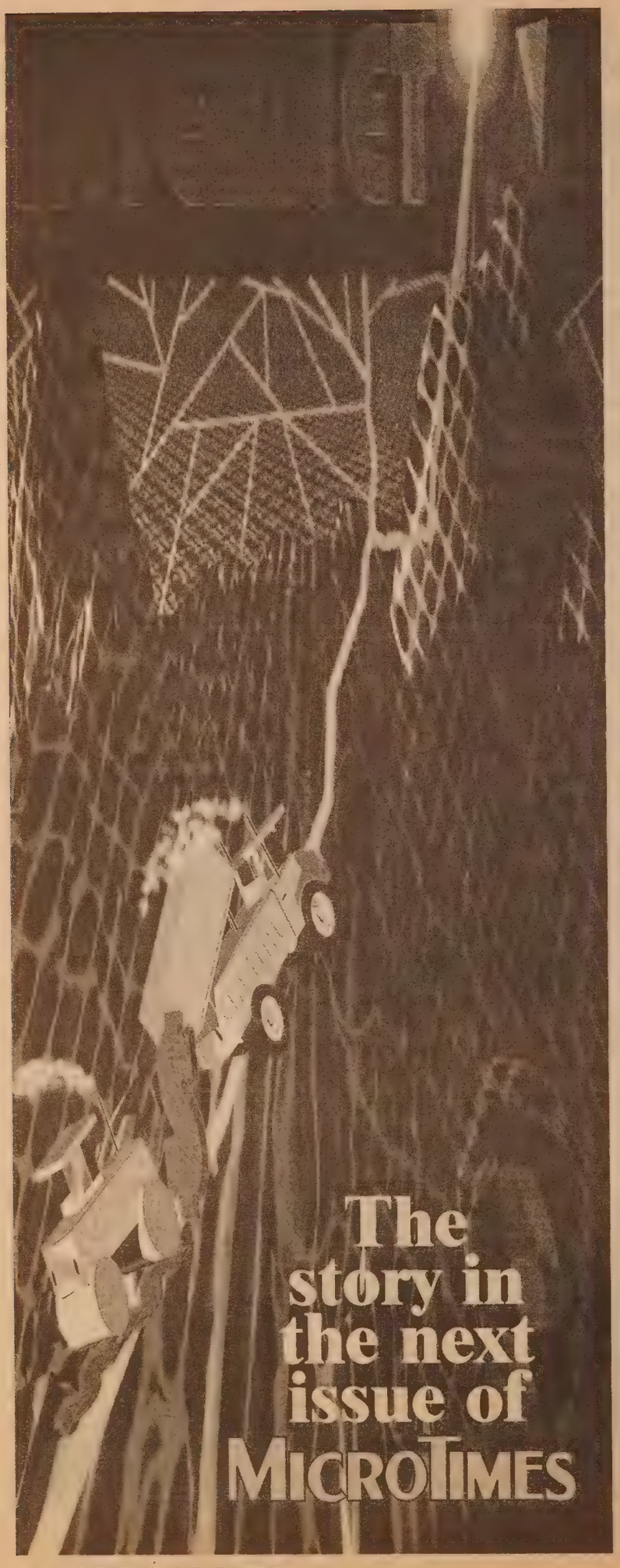

If baseball is your pleasure, two products highlight this field. Sierra's *Front Page Sports Baseball Pro 98* puts you in charge of the teams and players, with full rosters and even the disabled list. Build your team and play through the season, and watch the grand old game unfold on the screen in front of you. *Triple Play 98* from Electronics Arts gives you active crowds, color commentary and play-by-play announcers, inter-league play and over twenty different camera shots of ongoing action. Network and modem play round out this title.

Airborne

Originally the province of the hard-core gamer, simulations, flight-sims in particular, have exploded into the general gaming population. With relative ease anyone may quickly be piloting a high-performance jet fighter or a historic World War II bomber through the computer skies.

Electronic Arts' *Jane's Combat Simulations* is the perfect starting point for the budding simulation pilot. *ATF Gold* (Advance Tactical Fighter) puts you at the controls of a several cutting-edge and future military planes. From B-2 bombing runs to air defense missions in futuristic Air Force fighters, play commences against the computer or against a friend over a modem or network. *Longbow Gold* is Jane's Apache helicopter simulator, with over 400 missions to fly and a very detailed flight training area to instruct you in the art of flying and attacking. Later in the year *Longbow 2* will also appear adding new features and even more spectacular graphics. All of these products come with extensive reference material taken directly from the vaults of *Jane's Defense Weekly.*

Boasting a dynamic campaign generator that can set up different scenarios every time the sim is played, Interactive Magic has just released its latest simulator, *iF-22,* an extremely accurate representation of the newest USAF fighter. With a complete set of usable buttons in the cockpit, activated with the click of mouse, a player truly gains the feeling of actually flying one of these technological marvels. Also arriving on store shelves in the fall will be Interactive Magic's *iF-16 Viper,* a very accurate representation of this extremely versatile jet fighter/bomber.

Older aircraft will soon be represented with Microprose's *1943 European Air War* and Activision's *Fighter Squadron: The Screamin' Demons over Europe.* Both products give the player opportunities to fly various World War II aircraft, Axis and Allied, over the skies of Europe with spectacular graphics and wide varieties of missions.

Besides aircraft, other military vehicles are also modeled for computer use. Electronic Arts has just released *Jane's 688(I) Hunter/Killer* submarine simulator where you can take complete command of an advanced nuclear submarine and operate all of its detailed instrumentation from sonar and sensors to the launching of torpedoes and cruise missiles. Tank warfare is also available with Interactive Magic's *iM1A2,* which gives you command of a platoon of tanks in Kuwait, Bosnia or the Ukraine. Later this year they will also release *iPanzer '44,* giving you the opportunity of fighting tank warfare during World War II on the German front.

For players who would rather take a leisurely flight in a Cessna or Learjet and not have to avoid air to air missiles, a trio of "normal" flight simulators is appearing soon. Microsoft *Flight Simulator 98,* Looking Glass's *Flight Unlimited 2* and Sierra's *Pro Pilot* all give you the opportunity to fly over extremely detailed and accurate representations of San Francisco, the Grand Canyon and other scenic locales.

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Sight And Sound

With the advent of next generation 3-D graphics, sound and complex control instrumentation, some great gadgets have arrived to help enhance gameplay.

3-D graphic accelerators have taken off this year and have added a new level to graphics capabilities. The Diamond Monster 3D and Orchid Righteous 3D are add-on video cards (they piggyback with your already installed 2-D card) using the lightning-fast 3DFX chip. Both of these cards add great special effects to software written for them, dramatically enhancing the graphic appeal to such blockbuster hits as *Quake* and *Tomb Raider,* as well as increasing the frame rate of such titles. Most of the highly anticipated games of this fall and winter will take advantage of the power of these advanced cards.

For those wishing to add a single 2-D/3-D video card, Matrox has developed the Mystique 220. Known for super fast drivers on their 2-D cards, the Mystique adds 3-D support for games using Direct3D or written specifically for this card and includes a nice bundle of current games.

A new generation of 64-bit sound cards is now hitting the market. Creative Labs Sound Blaster Awe64 Gold and the Guillemot MaxiSound Game Theater 64 both are quality gaming products, giving great sound effects and adding much more capability over the old 32-bit products. The Diamond Monster Sound 3D is another next-generation sound card, giving full 3-D audio and support for multiple speakers. Software written for this card can give the very realistic impression of directional sound moving forward, backwards and to the sides.

Of course, with the convergence of computers and TVs, home theater speaker technology has also filtered into the computer world. SSI Products, a forerunner in surround-sound, is selling a complete six-piece Dolby Pro-Logic speaker set for use with computers. With two front, center, two rear and a subwoofer, this setup can pump out amazing theater sound at a price under $200.

With the multitude of control options available in the latest simulators and action games, several companies are putting out complete lines of programmable joysticks and throttles. Saitek, a new name in joysticks, has just released the X36, a 2-piece joystick and throttle unit with an added rudder rocker switch. With a programmable Windows interface and a multitude of buttons and switches, this unit can be set up to fly just about anything.

If you desire a controller for action games Logitech recently released the Cyberman 2, a two-handed device with an array of buttons on one side and a palm-size "puck" on the right. Unlike a normal joystick, this unit can simulate movement in full 3-D. ThrustMaster, the originator of multi-function joysticks, has developed a new unit, the X-Fighter, which has a solid stay-on-the desk base and solid grip with quick-response buttons. CH Products retails a complete line of joysticks, throttles and pedals available in all price ranges with the F-16 Fighterstick and Pro Throttle leading the way.

With computers now an integral part of the home, entertainment software will continue to flourish in the years to come. Instead of video games, park your children in front of the computer with an educational adventure to occupy their time. And if the drudgery of updating your checkbook with Quicken is bringing you down, grab a joystick and down some MIGs, or solve the mystery in that graphical masterpiece unfolding on the screen in front of you. ■

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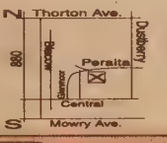

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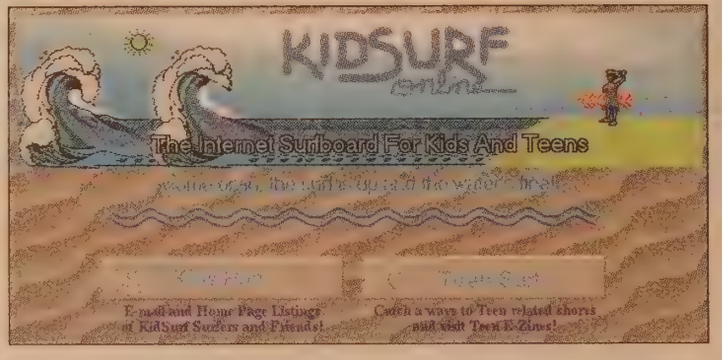
Teens And The Web

Forget The Sleaze—Young Netsurfers Use The Web For Fun And Learning

By Laura Bell

We read a lot of media hype about the alleged dangers of the Internet for youthful visitors. Laura Bell offers some more positive examples of online activities for teens.

Despite the media hype about pornography and other hazards, young people are flocking to the Net for considerably more positive and varied reasons: homework; downloading lyrics and music; finding a part-time job; publishing their work; reading teen magazines; chatting and, of course, downloading computer games.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Creative Outlet

Mountain Lake Software, Inc. (Northern California) started a site called **cyberteens** *(http://www.cyberteens.com/about.html)*. One popular section of the site, called **The Tidal Abyss**, was created by a 15-year-old known as the Kayotic One *(Kayotic@88net.net)*.

The Kayotic One explains how he gravitated to the Web as a creative outlet and benefited from the learning experience: "I got online about 12 months ago (June 1996). I always had a desire to create things with computers and not just be a passive 'user' or 'player' of other people's creations. Because of this interest, and with my interest in art, I quickly discovered that the Web provided a perfect medium for me to continue to create. Not only do I get to create for my own enjoyment, but it opens the doors for other users (thousands) to also see my work.

He stresses the fact that the Web allows anybody to be a producer as well as a consumer of content: "When I initially got on the Web, I realized that the Internet is a resource and an open medium, which is why I feel that I have been able to create some neat and very useful things. Many other people, especially kids, look at the Web as something that provides entertainment, and that the content is just 'there,' like on TV. But I can use the Internet to express my opinions and display my interests to the entire world with my Web site."

Kayotic has recently launched his own site, and admits he could use some volunteer help to keep it updated: "With **LightSpeed** *(http://www.88net.net/kayotic)*, I feel that I have created something that nobody has exactly touched on yet—creating a site that links to educational resources so that anyone can use it, even a first grader."

"I'd really like to encourage people, kids especially, to try to start creating their own *quality* Web content. To try and actually add to the 'wealth of the Web.'" Without this focus on quality, he says, "...the Net will become junky, like an overcrowded beach."

He also has an eye to the future, and is developing his skills accordingly: "I also see the commercial side of the Net. I would like to earn a little with the Net medium in the future."

I met another teenage Web enthusiast on ECN, a regional BBS in Southern California. The 14-year-old "Blaze" says of his online work and play: "My Dad introduced me to computers, but, for the most part, I picked it up by myself. I use my Internet skills at the LAN at school, besides my activities on ECN.

"I use the Net/Web basically for work here on ECN. Since I am staff, we are trying to bring in new users from the Internet. So what I do is go on the Net and post ads about ECN, many a week. In my spare time, I look for lyrics and guitar chords." He also likes downloading games to play, citing *http://www.download.com* , *http://www.happypuppy.com* , and *http://www.tucows.com* as favorite sites.

Homework Helper

Homework and research will always come into play for kids and teens on the Web. For example, check out *http://tristate.pgh.net/~pinch13/* .

continued on page 91

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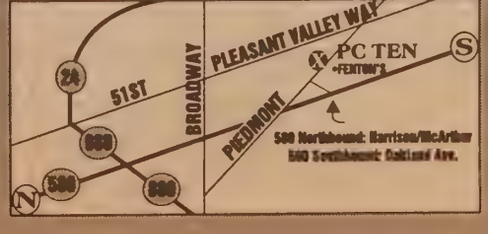

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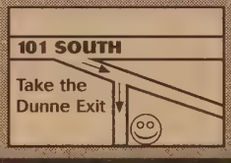

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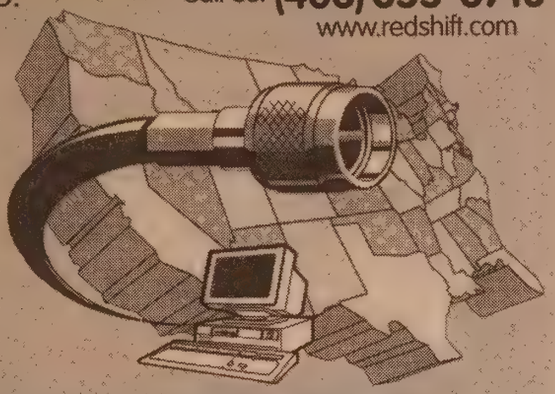

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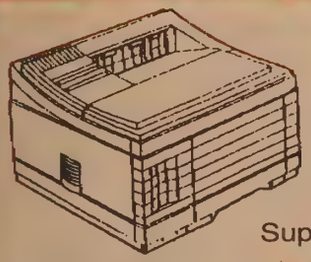

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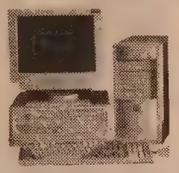

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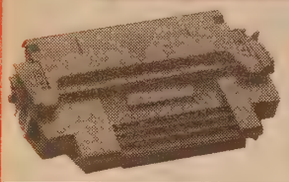

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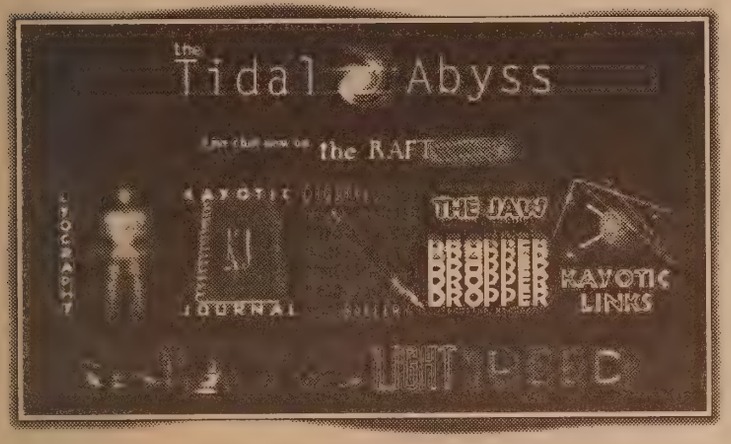
Left to right: the Tidal Abyss, Kayotic's offering to the Cyberteens site; TUCOWS, one of Kayotic's favorite game sites.

(Teens And The Web continued from page 84)

The owner of this site is a 10-year-old, named B. J. or (Bruce, Jr.)—B. J. does get assistance from his father and he can be emailed at: *pinch13@tristate.pgh.net* . The site offers 370 links for homework sites, with areas to click on if you need specific help: math and science, social studies, English and history.



The Kayotic One, 15-year-old designer: "The Web provided a perfect medium for me to continue to create. Not only do I get to create for my own enjoyment, but it opens the doors for thousands other users to also see my work."

When I first went to CompuServe asking for input on one of the many forums for teens and students, these two sites got particular recommendations:

•*http://www.outhouse.com* , sponsored by Los Gatos High School to help students with research.

• *http://www.stufo.com* , which includes info on *network.com* , opinion polls, research, libraries and more.

Online Socialization

The main characteristic of both the Web and the Internet is that they cross all demographic boundaries and preconceptions. You may find yourself engrossed in an intense email conversation, only to learn down the road that your chatting partner was on the other side of the world—or was a lot younger than you thought.

This was proven to me again recently when I posted on one of my writing mailing lists (writing chat) about the article I was doing on teens and the Web. One of the most frequent posters wrote back, saying he would be glad to contribute. After receiving his first notes, I wanted to know his "real name;" since he was using an email account with an ".edu" extension, I assumed that he was using one of his parents' accounts. Not true—further email from Timothy Williams, age 17, *(tnwillia@southern.edu)* proves again that one of the Web's big attractions for teens is that they love chatting.

"I use the Web for email (though I also have a Telnet-based email account)," Williams explains. "I also have a Web page on GeoCities *(http://www.geocities.com/athens/forum/8276)*. I use Yahoo and WebCrawler to find information for my writing, or for Web page design or computer graphics, or anything else I want to know. I use Virtual Places to chat with other people.

"In general, I use the Web and all of the Net to keep in touch with old friends and make new ones. I do this through email, chat and my home page. My home page is constantly under construction, as I draw new graphics or add new information, or just try out a new html tag.

"My advice to other teens is to go for it. The Internet is the cheapest, easiest, and fastest way to communicate with people who don't live near you. Also, if you have a hobby that you can provide information on, you can reach a worldwide audience."

Also Of Interest

Two Web content providers offer stopping points along the "Information Highway" for female netsurfers. A search engine launched especially for women (and girls) by Kathleen McMahon *(km@wwwomen.com)* is located at *http://www.wwwomen.com* . After entering "teen girls" into the search string slot, you will find eighteen matches, including Zap! 4 teens, a magazine for young teen women, and "Expect the best from a girl and that is what you will get"— a national campaign for educational equity for girls/early teens.

Content provider Aliza Sherman *(asherman@interport.net)* is owner of Cybergrrls, Inc. Sherman launched her spot on the Web "so women and girls would have a friendly spot to visit." Sherman's most prominent sites: *http://www.cybergrrls.com* ; *http://www.webgrrls.com* , and *http://www.femina.com* (another search engine).

Darrell Williams is a Tennessee dad who launched a site named "kids surf" *(http://www.kidsurf.net)*. The opening page hails this site as "an Internet surfboard for kids and teens." First page highlights: "kidsport", "lighthouse"(pointing the way to fun learning sites), and "passport" (surf the latest movies).

Williams has two younger children, who with his guidance are already using both the Net and the Web. "David (age 8) *(http://www.kidsurf.net/kidsport/kids/david)* uses email quite a bit and writes to his cousins in Georgia and South Carolina and his friends around the world. Daniel (5) can't read well yet, but enjoys the Nickelodeon Web site. He has learned to click on hyperlinks, himself, to see what he wants to view."

Just Do It!

Nothing stays the same on the Web—its offerings change constantly. The best way to learn more and keep up with the change(s) is to make frequent visits to areas of the Net where folks talk about these additions.

For example: any Usenet group you find with the word "teen" in it that isn't specifically for a

fan club; several mailing lists *(http://www.liszt.com)* which discuss teens and teens issue. Also be on the look out for SIGs (special interest groups) and forums on BBSes and information services (AOL, MSN, et al) which discuss teens and special interests for group discussion.

When searching out new groups or topics, keep in mind that AltaVista is more oriented towards research and discussion groups; whereas Yahoo is more commercial.

Learning more the Web is a family oriented project—do it together and make it a family thing. Happy Web surfing! ■

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INTERACTIVE TV:
Once again, with Issue #167, we revisit the subject of Digital Showbiz.
Whereas last year we took a look at computer-generated special effects in the movie business, this year we're doing something completely different--examining the current state of interactive television.
Few industries have seen more grandiose hype and more collapsed alliances than interactive TV, and several years after the consumer electronics and computer worlds were abuzz with talk of Convergence, nobody in the US has successfully deployed any interactive-TV services to consumers outside of field trials.
In France, on the other hand, people are flocking to a new service called Television Par Satellite (TPS), which its hopeful owners believe will launch a veritable explosion of business opportunities, shades of Minitel in the early '80s.
TPS uses technology called OpenTV, developed by Thomson Sun Interactive, a joint venture between Thomson multimedia and Sun Microsystems. Thomson Sun, through TPS, enjoys the currently
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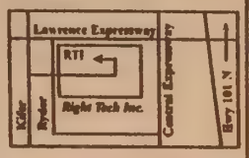

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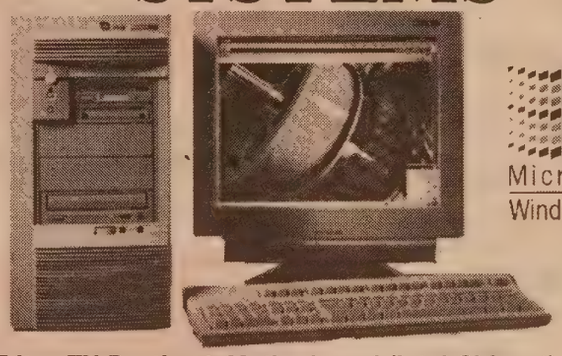

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- Keytronic 101-Key 25
- Focus Key FK6200 25
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- US Robotics33.6K w/Voice 105
- US Robotics 33.6K External 160
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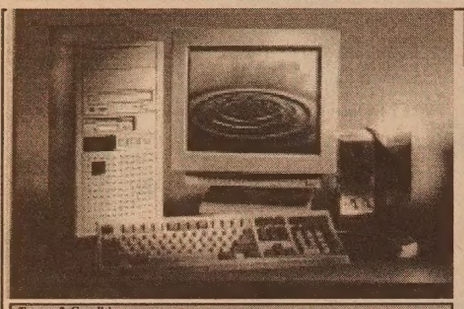

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Mitsumi 104 enhanced Keyboard
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CPU Heatsink & Cooling Fan
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Logitech Serial MouseMan Cordless $29
Logitech MouseMan combo 3-Button/Cordless $23
Logitech TrackMan Vista $35
Logitech TrackMan Marble (combo) $79
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miro Media Online 33.6k + SC w/wave + voice $75
Practical Peripheral 28.8k Internal Faxmodem..... $159
SupraExpress 33.6k PnP w/Voice Int. (retail)..... $59(85)
Supra Netcommander ISDN Int. $259
USR Sportster 33.6k V.34 /voice Int (upg. 56K)$93/105
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USR Sportster 56k Int/Ext (retail) $179/199

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ASUS VX97 430VX Intel® chipset 512k $105
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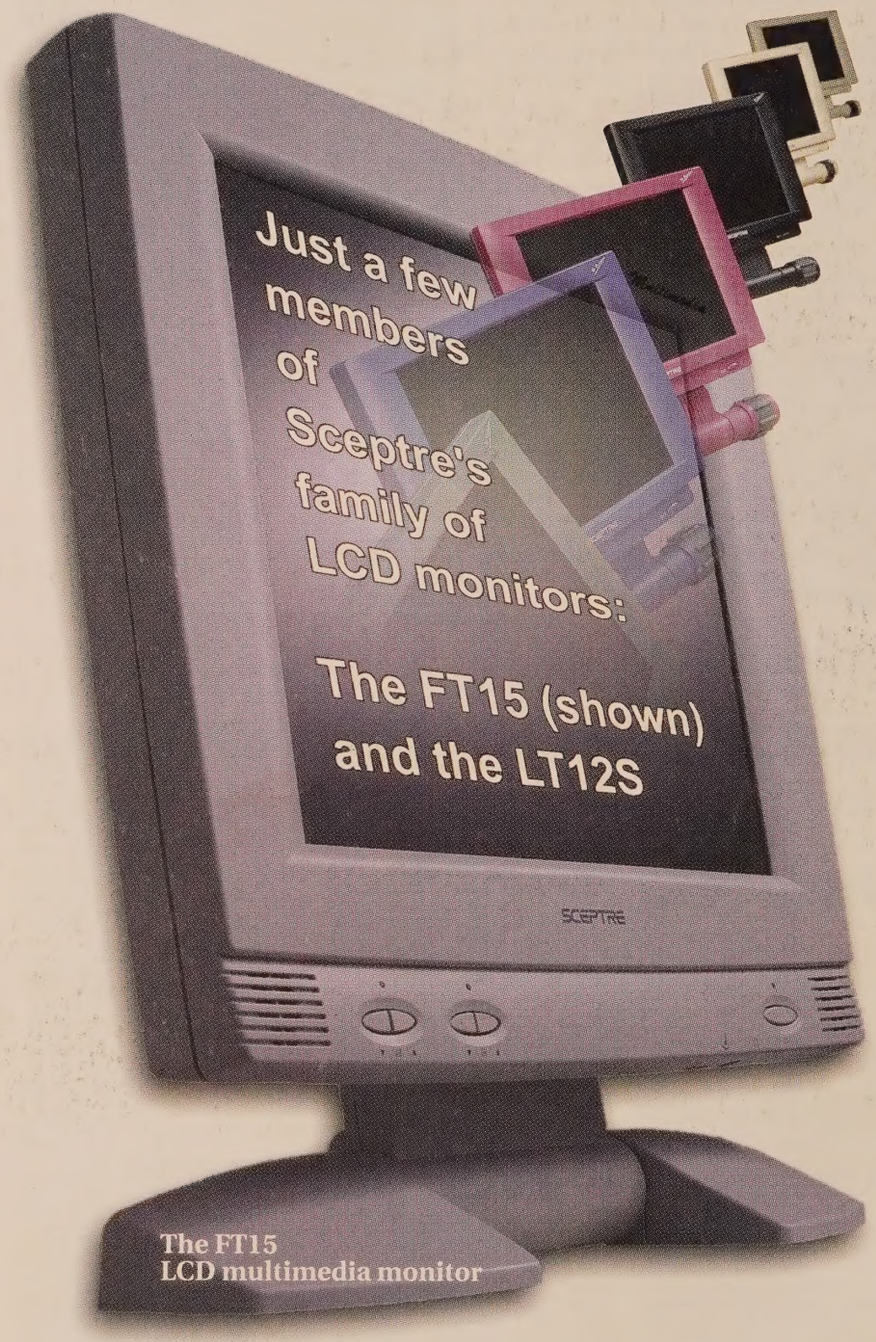

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